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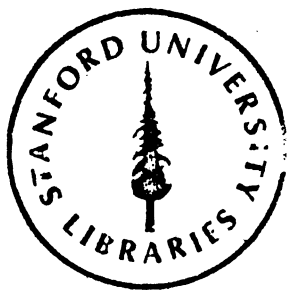
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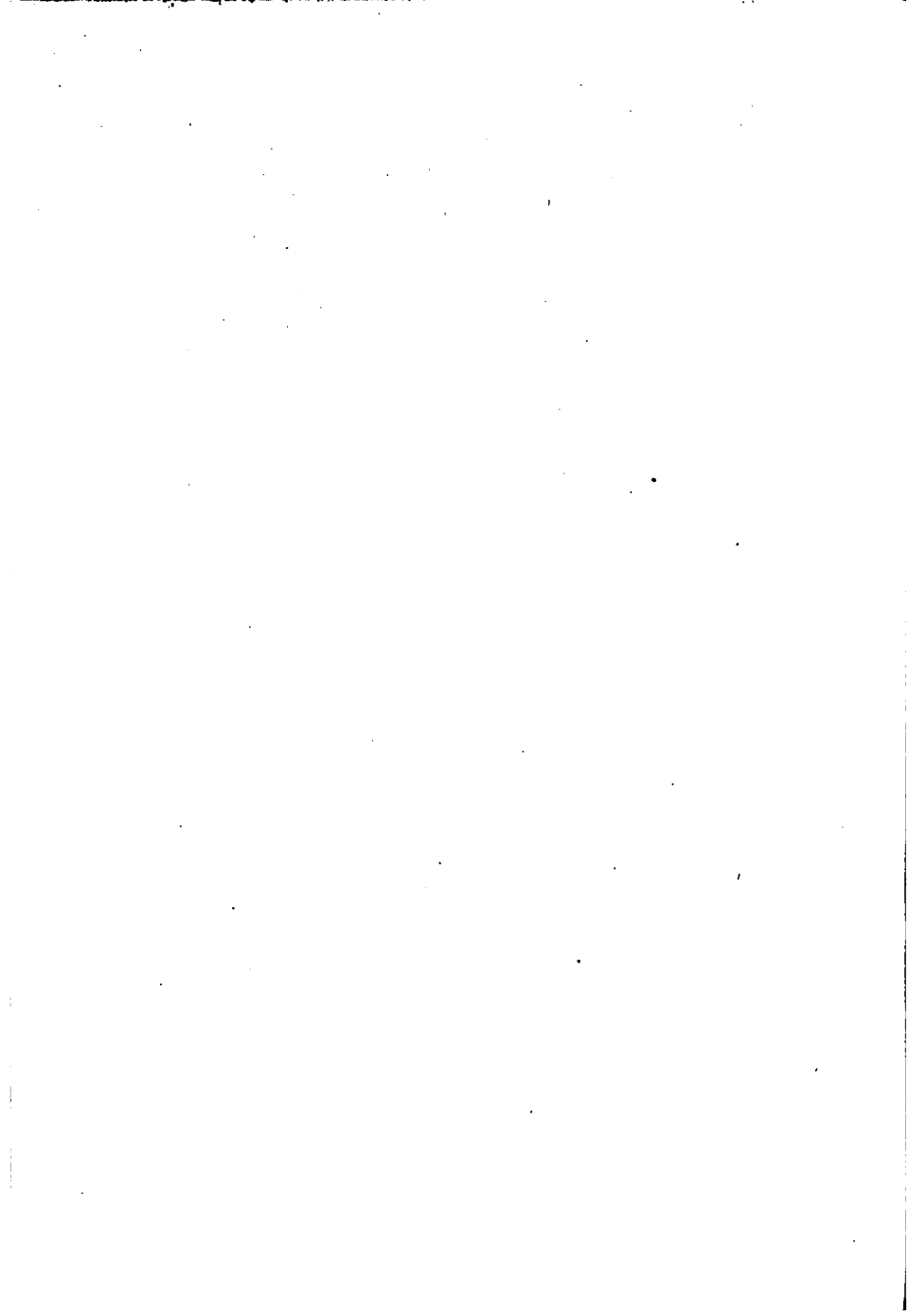


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**HENRY ELIZABETH**



***BY THE SAME AUTHOR***

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IF I WERE KING  
MARJORIE  
THE PROUD PRINCE  
THE LADY OF LOYALTY HOUSE  
THE DRYAD  
THE FLOWER OF FRANCE  
THE ILLUSTRIOUS O'HAGAN  
NEEDLES AND PINS  
SERAPHICA  
THE GORGEOUS BORGIA  
THE GOD OF LOVE  
THE O'FLYNN  
THE KING OVER THE WATER  
THE FAIR IRISH MAID  
A HEALTH UNTO HIS MAJESTY  
CALLING THE TUNE  
FOOL OF APRIL  
THE GLORIOUS RASCAL  
IN SPACIOUS TIMES  
NURSE BENSON

*Sunday Larn Cary*  
**Henry Elizabeth**

*By Justin Huntly McCarthy : :*

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TO  
HAYDEN TALBOT



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**PART I.**

**THE LADY OF THE FORGE**





# HENRY ELIZABETH

## PART I,

### THE LADY OF THE FORGE

#### CHAPTER I

##### BRAGINTON SMITHY

**T**HE west country poet, Philemon Minister, declared in song that the reign of his beloved sovereign Elizabeth showed, to loyal eyes, as all one splendid summer. Truly, the early years of that reign might, to a flattering minstrel, seem easy gilded years enough. At least Nature saw to it that each of these years had its meed of summer and none was more summerful than the tenth year of the great Queen's rule, the year which brought a company of visitors to Braginton in Devon, to the doing or undoing of its master.

Braginton was a small village reclining on both sides of the wooded lane which forked languidly from the main road over the cliffs of Tor Bay. It had few inhabitants and therefore few houses, but the folk were all well-to-do in their way. The ruddy soil, the warm moist air, favoured the fruits of the earth and the flowers of the field. Sheep and cattle thrive on the rich grass, while the Braginton bees garnered the best honey in Devonshire. It was as good as it was easy to be a farmer in that friendly place; it was good, too, to be a sailor, with boats upon the shore, and take a noble toll from the populous waters. But if it was good to be a Braginton landsman or a Braginton seaman, how inestimably better it was to be the man whom the one

and the other duly plied with rent and gifts, the fortunate human being who was Lord of the Manor of Braginton.

Braginton was one of those backwaters from the main stream of existence which neither seeks nor gains much notice from the busy world. It lay so snug and sequestered amid its flowing meadows that it might well-nigh be a portion of the primal world over-looked in all the changes that had shaken England since the days of the Druids. But the comfortable air of a country side is often as deceitful as a mirage. Passions of many kinds can ramp and rage in regions apparently devoted to pigs and peace, poultry and prosperity. Braginton might wax fat, Braginton might seem drowsily indifferent to the humming world beyond its borders, but even its isolation owned a share of the infirmities that flourish in frequented cities.

There were three buildings of notable importance in Braginton, each of which served in its way to keep the pulses of the little community from flagging. There was the church—accorded precedence in a perfunctory spirit of reverence—there was the Manor House, well aware of its supremacy, and then, with a sudden descent in dignity, there was the village smithy. The gap was not so great as it might have seemed to a stranger hearing of the case. It was well to be the Lord of the Manor and dwell in a fair house. It was well to be the Lord's chaplain and represent heaven with much eating and more drinking. But it was well, too, and little less enviable than either of these lots, to be the blacksmith of Braginton, though his abode was no more than a small cottage and garden by the side of his smithy. For the blacksmith of Braginton was famous throughout the countryside because of his strength, and still more famous because of his sister.

It is no strange thing in the West Country, which is so blessed with temperate seasons, to find certain days in the first flushing of Spring almost as mellow as if the world were glowing into August. The sunlight of such a day brooded over Braginton in the waning March of the year fifteen hundred and sixty-eight. It flung the mantle of its fair false summer over the hillsides and the hedges. Already the white-thorn had thrust forth the beauty of its blossom, already the trees were quickening into their green

livery, already primrose and violet flourished their colours. But the warm air which quickened leaf and flower seemed only to lull the inhabitants of Braginton into a snoring sense of repose. Cottage and farm yielded to the genial influences which spread their favour upon the church, the Manor House and the smithy. Especially, as it might seem, upon the smithy.

In the flame of this over-ripe March afternoon, the smithy of Braginton was as a great rock to its occupant. Though the road that threaded the village and the fields that bounded it wallowed in sunlight, Braginton smithy was cool and dark and comfortable, seeming cooler, though the banked furnace glowed hard by the anvil, than the glaring atmosphere outside.

It certainly seemed so to the smith who took his ease there, with a vast black-jack of ale to his hand, and chuckled to himself as he drank. He had his reasons for chuckling as he had his reasons for sitting there in the dim light of his smithy, instead of drinking like a gentleman in his cottage parlour at the top of his garden; and the reasons for his mirth and the reasons for his lodgement blended into one and the same reason. This was his knowledge that in the living-room of the cottage, the young Lord of the Manor sat at ease with the smith's sister and pledged her in libations of blended ale and brandy: his knowledge that he had been well served by the cool cunning of the woman and the hot tom-folly of the man.

Jonah Copping, the smith, was a big man and as black as a shadow. His shaggy locks with the full bush of hair that enveloped cheeks and chin were savagely sable. If he had stood naked he would have been deemed well-nigh clothed, so furred about he was on all his body. There was in his carriage a swaggering joviality that seemed to challenge with inappropriate truculence any question of its reality. He told the world that he was a plain hearty fellow, and the world, so far as it was composed of his neighbours, wisely took him at his word lest he should proceed to prove his heartiness by punchings and thumpings. He was still in his early prime and in the plenitude of his strength, and when he wished to test it otherwise than in the manner of his craft, he had to travel to distant hamlets to prove his vigour, for there was

no one in peaceful Braginton—or rather no more than one—to think of crossing his belligerent humour.

With a surly cheerfulness Copping sat and drank his ale and reviewed the recent happenings that delighted him. The young Master of Braginton had passed the night under his cottage roof, and how he had passed it Copping knew rather better than the young man himself. For the smith was sober in spite of his potations, while the Squire was fuddled early of yesterday evening, woke fuddled in the late morning and had been busy fuddling himself ever since. The smith entertained no surprise at an event so unusual, for though the young man habitually drank hard enough his head was ever harder than his liquor and he always carried his drink gallantly. Copping was content to know that there be ways of medicining a man's beverage which will conquer the hardest headpiece.

Also he was content to know that the Squire had not slept the night long in the guest chamber accorded to him. He was yet more content to know of a paper which he carried in the pocket of his jerkin behind the shield of his leather apron. As he thought of it he took it out and eyed it kindly. He was little of a scholar and hand of write like print of press was in the nature of a mystery to him, but he was wise enough to know that the ragged writing which occupied the upper part of the paper—paper which had made the tail-page of a Bible—was the work of his sister, who was a better scholar than he, that it set forth very clearly a certain promise, and that the staggering scrawl at the end thereof represented the signature of the Lord of the Manor. Knowing so much, goodman smith reflected pleasantly that his sister and he had done a fine night's work between them, and that it was fitting to pass the morning in refreshing meditations.

These meditations were disturbed, at first faintly and thereafter more insistently, by a sound which his senses recognised as the sound of approaching horses. Lazily shifting himself a little the smith listened and learned. Two horses coming that way, both at a pace that was more than easy, one of the animals undoubtedly going lame. Copping frowned. This should mean business for the forge, but in that hour of heady day-dreams the smith was more inclined to resent custom than to greet it. He tried to hope that he was mistaken as

to the lameness, and that the riders would pass by and leave him to his bliss. At the same time he knew very well that he was not mistaken, and that the riders would not pass by. Another few minutes justified his fears. The riders came into view, journeying up the shady lane from the main road, and in a further minute the smith, still seated, could see them as they drew bridle and came to a halt in the sunny open space in front of the smithy. They were a man and a woman, and the smith reckoned from his shelter that the woman's horse had cast a shoe and that he was to be called upon to set the matter straight. So he cursed his visitors sulkily under his breath, as if he grudged every second taken from his agreeable speculations.

He had to move none the less, when the voice of the male rider, in a tone that rang command, summoned a dimly visible smith from a plainly visible smithy.

"Come forth, Gaffer smith," the voice cried, "come forth to ply your trade, and come quickly."

Copping rose reluctantly to his feet, lurched through the large width of door into the sunlight and stood before the threshold straddled, with his huge hand shading his eyes.

"Who calls?" he questioned sourly, as if he had become for the first time aware of the existence of the riders, and as he spoke he took stock of his undesired clients. They made none of his knowledge; they were patently strangers to the Tor Bay country. As they wore what he would have called outlandish garments, he might have taken the pair for French folk but that there was no mistaking the home-bred English of the man's speech. He accepted them as of his own race though probably not of West Country blood.

"I call," the stranger gentleman answered sharply, in the note of one accustomed to exact obedience. "Here is a horse that has cast a shoe, and here be we that are in a hurry to push on with our journey. Wherefore bustle, Gaffer smith, bustle, as if your patron Saint Vulcan were joggng your elbow, and finish the job as quickly as you can."

Jonah Copping looked sourly at a man of perhaps thirty, perhaps more, who sat square in his saddle as if he commanded the world. The man was finely clothed, with a fineness that meant nothing to Jonah, whose idea of splendour jumped with the scarlet and ermine of the Mayor of Exeter. Also he

looked lewdly at the woman, his companion, a woman in the dawn of the twenties whose comeliness tickled his blood.

"I can but do my best," he said sourly, and turned from the sunshine into the twilight of the smithy and busied himself with the brisking of his furnace. The stranger gentleman swung himself easily off his horse, and assisted, in silence, his companion to alight. Then he gave his own horse into the woman's care, and she stood by its side, in the little sunny open space, holding the reins over the animals neck with her right hand while her left hand played carelessly against her gown with her riding whip. To the superficial wits of the smith she seemed wholly indifferent as to whether she travelled, or did not travel, any further that day or indeed any day. The imperious gentleman took the lady's horse and led it to the door of the forge where Copping received it reluctantly.

"Hurry, man, hurry," said the imperious gentleman. "Swing your hammer as if the devil pricked your fingers. The sooner you are done the better I shall be pleased, and the better you will be paid, for my time is precious and delay is damnable."

His face smiled as he spoke, and his voice affected to have laughter in it, but the mirth was of a kind which seemed, even to the thick-skinned man at whom it was directed, to bring an unpleasant chill into the genial heat of the day.

Very sullenly the smith dismissed his enjoyable thoughts on the thing accomplished, and set himself to the immediate business of plying his trade. He led the horse into the shelter of the smithy, blew up his furnace and spat on his palms, as he grasped pincers and hammer. The imperious gentleman stood hard by the door of the shed to see that the work was carried out to his liking, and while he did so the woman that was his companion waited a little apart, wearing the same grave air of restrained, disdainful acquiescence.

Now all this coming and calling and blowing of bellows and the rest had made something of a pother, and because anything in the nature of a pother was unusual in Braginton, it had the effect of bringing the smith's sister from the seclusion of the cottage and the company of a sot into the little garden that lay between cottage and forge to see what was toward. She leaned on a post of the open gate, and stared in bold surprise upon the strange lady.

If Jonah Copping was what the gossips call a fine figure

of a man, very certainly Zillah Copping, his sister, was a fine figure of a woman. She was almost as tall as her brother, who was nigh six feet and looked higher, and for her sex she was as bigly built. She had a mane of black hair, which her neighbours called a mop, that clouded all about her brows and ears and nape like the nimbus of night. She had hot black eyes that could dance with laughter or blaze with rage; she had full red lips that were made for a Titan's mouth to kiss. She was bosomed and beamed like a goddess of maternity; her rich presence suggested fecundity, opulence, the largesse of life; she had a skin of a white smoothness that defied the weather and a none too nice attention. Her movements were as easy as her form was ample, and though her disposition seemed liberal she carried a reputation for chastity which none gainsaid who remembered the size and weight of the smith's right hand, but which the critical, in whispers behind lifted fingers, attributed to a full appreciation of the value of her physical charms and her intelligent desire to sell her ware in the best market. She looked like an amazon of the army of Hippolita, and that wicked old hunter Orion would have been as hot to ravish her as if she had been the very moon-goddess.

The stranger lady showed no consciousness of the staring gaze of the woman. If she were in the least degree aware of its veiled animosity she bore any such knowledge with an air of complete disregard. Leaning easily against the horse of her travelling companion, she watched the ceremonial of the smithy with a patient unconcern that contrasted oddly with her companion's expert scrutiny of the labour of the smith. She seemed as one who was too familiar with a life lived under the insistent gaze of many eyes to be troubled by insolent admiration or insolent hostility. She took the glowerings of the girl as she had taken the gapings of the smith, as if they did not exist, meeting them with the same air of abstraction with which she regarded the smithy and the distant homesteads and the sweet smelling hedges of the lane. But in another moment her unconcern was more directly challenged.



## CHAPTER II

### THE MASTER OF BRAGINTON

**I**T was at this moment that the young Lord of the Manor, somewhat swollen of temper by blendings of ale and brandy, swayed upon the scene. Vexation at being left alone rather than any curiosity as to the seeming of the new arrivals had pricked him to his feet, and stirred his unsteady steps to the door of the cottage and the cleanness of the free air beyond. He saw his girl—for so he named her vacantly—propped against a post of the gate, gazing steadfastly at something beyond. He wondered vaguely what the wench looked at—and then, as he moved unsteadily across the garden, he saw.

Hard by the door of the forge, evidently supervising the blacksmith's craftsmanship, stood a tall man with a grave face, who did not interest the somewhat bemused young gentleman at all. Nor, it was plain, was the tall man with the grave face the object of the girl's regard. The object was a woman in a riding dress, who stood by a horse with her right arm about its neck and her left hand playing with a riding whip. The youth's glance deepened into a stare. He pushed past Zillah through the gate and stumbled to the space in front of the forge, still staring hard.

For an instant something like an impingement of interest appeared to stir the indifferent lady. It was indeed with no show of admiration that she noted the newcomer, but with a faint smile of diverted surprise. It might well seem to her that she had come in this unknown village into a kind of kingdom of giants, both the smith and the woman being uncommon tall and uncommon large, and she might well take it for granted that the rest of the inhabitants were made to match

these gargantuesque characters. But when this third figure staggered out into the sunlight she could easily believe that her careless assumption was a sterling truth. She saw before her a man half a head taller and half a foot broader than the smith. He was plainly younger than the smith and probably younger than the woman. And although he moved awkwardly and was homely in his habit, it was not difficult for one who knew the world to see that he was of a better station than the pair. He had a tousled head of red hair that flamed like a painted sun on a signboard, and he had very blue eyes that surveyed the strange lady with a gaze of great astonishment and greater admiration.

Indeed the Master of Braginton gaped in amazement. He regarded a being whose like he had never beheld before. The richness of her habit had something strange in it, as of one that came from overseas and carried an alien garb, but the youth had no heed for such niceties. What he heeded was the clean slimness of the girl's body and the beauty of the girl's face. It was beauty of a kind that the youth had never encountered. The smith's sister had seemed to him of late the top of all jolly girls—and he had courted a many in the land about Braginton—but here was a difference from them all, even from the smith's sister. Those dusky tresses so carefully arrayed under the small feathered cap, those finely moulded features, those steady cold disdainful eyes, all told him of a story which he had never begun to read. He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her—always his first impulse with any kissable she—but he knew without telling that any such enterprise would be unwelcomed, even if the girl were alone. Yet it had never before occurred to him that any advances of his could be unwelcome.

Also it had never occurred to the young Lord of Braginton that it was ill-mannered to stare too long and too rawly upon any fair face. And the face he now regarded was fair with such a fairness as never yet had come within his ken or into his dreams. It had ever been his countryside experience that when he was pleased to look upon a comely lass the comely lass was very ready to smile gratitude for his regard. But the comeliest in all his region had nothing, for all her buxom whites and reds, that could so completely command his fancy and compel his regard as this enchanting stranger, Old

tales, forgotten since his boyhood, of fairy creatures fitfully visiting earth for the enslavement of mortals, twitched at the strings of his memory. And still he glared and gaped, in all the bewilderment of a puzzled process of thought struggling with a new problem. But after a little while it dumfounded him to find that the woman's face remained wholly unmoved by his rustic admiration. Rather, indeed, she looked at him with a careless calm, as if his great frame cast no shadow.

His disconcertment was therefore glad enough of the temporary distraction afforded by the advance of the lady's traveling companion from the door of the smithy to her side. Though the Master of Braginton had not nearly stared his fill at the woman's beauty, he now allowed himself the leisure to survey the countenance of the male stranger. He beheld a finely shaped oval face with a pronounced nose, a slightly peaked chin with a pointed beard, and a pale complexion that suggested, on the one hand, dissipation, and on the other studiousness. There was a note of strife, too, for over the left eyebrow ran the small cicatrice of an old wound. The man's face was as grave and immobile as a tragic mask, but the eyes in the still visage seemed always either to menace or to deride or to condemn. The Master of Braginton came to a muddled conclusion that the stranger carried a damned uncomfortable mien and that he would make no manner of a jolly pot-companion. If the youth admired the woman hotly he felt that he scarcely less hotly disliked the man. The pair had this, if little else, in common beyond their strangerhood, that neither of them seemed to attach the slightest importance to the interest which the young squire was pleased to take in them.

The young man was a trifle, but only a trifle, nonplussed by this. To show how much he was at ease he strolled, as steadily as he could, towards the smithy and, looking through its opening, cast an observing eye upon the horse that the smith was shoeing.

"You ride from Brixham, I see," said the young man, with an air of one that wishes to be on good terms with strangers, but at the same time to impress them with his own ability and importance.

The gentleman glanced at him quickly.

"How do you know that?" he asked in an even voice. The young man answered with a grin.

"That is an easy riddle to read. There is never a horse in all these parts that is not known to me. That horse yonder owns no other master than Black Ben of Brixham."

There was the faintest show of impatience on the gentleman's face. There was the faintest hint of impatience in the gentleman's voice as he spoke.

"I care not," he declared, "who owns a horse so long as the beast rides steady and rides true. But I could wish that this nag's master had seen to his better shoeing, for I have no liking for delay on my road."

The young man was not too bemused to note that the cavalier seemed nettled at his mention of Black Ben of Brixham. He was too bemused to do more than wonder, dully, why he should be nettled. Black Ben kept an inn at Brixham, and many gentlemen coming from foreign parts were glad to make use of his horses which were easily counted the best in that corner of the world. The Master of Braginton had never troubled his head as to how the tavern-keeper came to command such a fine stable of horses. He was carelessly aware that the fellow tasted the favour of Squire Garwood who owned a manor thereby in which he seldom dwelt so that few in Brixham had ever seen his face, and that Black Ben looked after the place for him in protracted absences. The young man had never beheld the squire and never wanted to. Black Ben and his patron slipped from his swimming wits, but his curiosity about the strangers was still kindled and he had a mind to satisfy it.

"And where," asked the Master of Braginton, airing what he meant, with an eye to the young lady, for an engaging smile, "may you be bound?"

"I am bound," said the gentleman curtly, "for the end of my journey."

As he spoke he turned his back upon the young man abruptly, with the evident intention of signifying that he desired no further conversation. Wherefore the young man, who was now in a talkative mood, lurched towards the strange lady, but she gave him so fixed a look of nonchalance that, to his own infinite surprise, he found himself for the moment at a disadvantage and at a loss what to say or do to assert the importance with which he considered himself to be endowed. Then he saw his chance and took it.

There was an elm tree that stood by the smithy in a corner of comfortable grass between the forge and the gate of the cottage. On the grizzled bark of the elm tree someone had been quite lately busy with a blade, carving the white wounds of foolishness on the ancient skin.

That someone was the Master of Braginton, who had been about the business no later than yesterday. The thing aimed at was an emblematic outline of a heart encircling an arrangement of capital letters. Immediately under the bulbous summits of the conventional heart, youth and its steel had accomplished the incision of two letters, an "H" and an "E" and the sturdy shaft of an uncompleted "B." A vacant space that lay below was clearly destined to frame other initials suggestive of amorous alliance.

With a strong sense that he was asserting his self-respect and his right to respect from others, the young man lurched from the shadow of the pent-house into the sunny open and brought himself to a halt in front of the venerable elm. Ostentatiously, even defiantly, whistling the burden of a pastoral tune, he lugged his knife from his belt and proceeded to the perfection of his handiwork.

After a minute or so of scratching with his point, however, he found himself, to his heat, still annoyed by the sheer aloofness of the strangers from him and his business. He had been peeping at the woman in the intervals of his woodcraft, but now while he still regarded her, he addressed her companion with a backward jerk of the head in his direction.

"It's too close a day," he said, "for warmer work than taking one's ease in the shade."

The gentleman with the pointed beard glanced away for an instant from the glowing metal that was slowly shaping into a shoe.

"Then why do you work?" he asked. He shrugged his shoulders as he spoke and devoted himself again to the smith and his employment.

The young man sniggered fatuously.

"I work to please a woman," he hiccupped. "What better can a man do than work to please a woman?"

The speech was uttered stupidly enough, drunkenly enough, but the sound of it seemed to fall across the stranger's face like the flick of a whip-lash. He glanced for a moment at the

girl who stood with her arm over the horse's neck and read nothing there.

"There is a greater wisdom in your speech," he said gravely, "than I should have expected from the speaker."

The youth, who had by this time finished somewhat clumsily his capitl "B," swung towards the speaker angrily.

"Why should I not speak wisdom?" he snarled. "Would you take me for a countryman?"

The gentleman looked at him again. The blacksmith's task was nearly completed and allowed him leisure for less important matters. He answered in a mood of half-amused contempt.

"I would not take you for a buttry-boy," he said, "for I fear you would steal too much ale."

"Have you to know," cried the Squire thickly, "that the ale I drink is my own. Have you to know that I am Lord of the Manor here."

The stranger smiled a dry little smile that scarcely discomposed the calmness of his face.

"Do I offend your gentility?" he asked. "With whom have I the privilege to converse?"

The Lord of the Manor was angry, and because of his drinking, flustered in his wrath.

"Men call me Master Braginton of Braginton Hall yonder," he shouted. "There has been a Braginton Hall since Doomsday Book and a Braginton for its master. Who may you be to question my breeding?"

"My name," said the gentleman, "is of no import. To those whose stock is rooted here I am no more than a shadow that floats by and is seen no more."

"I do not care if I ever see you again," the Master of Braginton retorted rudely, "but I would not say as much concerning yonder gentlewoman."

As he spoke he made an awkward bow towards the girl who stood by the horse. She looked at him with a changeless face; also she looked without seeming to look at the other faces near her, the flaming face of the smith and the ironic face of her travelling companion and the fierce eager face of the girl that leaned on the gate.

"You are prodigal in compliment," she said, in a quiet, sweet voice, "that you were wiser to husband. For you wound the

poor tree with a symbol that implies allegiance. I take it that those letters are the heralds of your names."

"They are no less," he answered boisterously. "Henry Braginton, by your leave, and no better name, nor man, though I say it, in the width of West Country."

The girl took the proud assertion with no show of interest. Only she pointed with her riding-whip towards the youth's design.

"You have hacked three letters," she said, "and you give me but two. What does your big 'E' stand for?"

A sudden flush deepened the ruddiness of the young man's cheek.

"That stands for my second name," he stammered. He was so obviously troubled and reluctant that the young lady persisted, with a point of malice.

"And what may your second name be?"

She noticed, as she spoke, that the smith grinned and that the woman by the gate frowned, and apparently she felt lightly curious.

"Elizabeth," the young man answered, sheepishly, "Henry Elizabeth; that is my name. So it stands on the Parish Register for all the world to see."

"It is a strange naming," said the young lady. "How did it come about?"

As Henry Elizabeth did not seem inclined to answer this question the smith struck into the conversation.

"That is an easy question to answer," said Copping. "When Master Braginton's mother was near to be brought to bed, she dreamed that an angel told her that if she named her child Elizabeth the world would go well with the babe. The good lady took it for granted that her offspring would be a girl, so she made a vow in Church to call her Elizabeth, that being also the name of a King's daughter and one that was like to be Queen. Wherefore she was not a little vexed when, instead of the expected maid, she bore a lusty male child—even his honour here present."

The fair stranger could scarcely forbear to smile at this story, which encouraged the smith to proceed.

"The good lady stuck to her vow and determined to call the child, who would needs be male in spite of her, by the name Elizabeth. Master Parson protested, but after much brawling

the parties came to this agreement, that the boy should have a man's name first, and what better name than Henry, our Elizabeth's father. Thus does his honour come to be Henry Elizabeth.

"Aye," said the Master of Braginton sulkily, "the name came that way. It is not a name I should have chosen for myself, but I must make the best of it and gain it respect and credit since it is not to be got rid of."

"Why should it be got rid of?" the girl asked, carelessly. She did not put into words what her manner suggested, that it mattered very little how so uncouth a bumpkin was christened.

"Because I am a man," he answered hotly, angrily aware of her heedless contempt. "And it shames a man silly to carry a woman's name."

By this time the smith's job was nearly completed, the last nail was being hammered home, and the traveller felt himself at leisure to take a part in the colloquy.

"You are much mistook, Master Braginton," he said coldly, "if you think there is anything unbecoming for a man to carry a girl's name. In the fair land of France it is a very usual and a very gracious custom. There never lived a gallanter gentleman in the world than Monsieur de Joyeuse, and his Christian name is Anne."

"I care not a curse for the ways of foreign folks," the Master of Braginton began vehemently, but the gentleman raised a gloved hand and motioned him to a silence which, somewhat to his surprise, Henry Elizabeth felt himself constrained to yield.

"As for your name Elizabeth," the stranger continued, "I fear it is wasted upon you. There are few men in England who could carry it as mannishly as she does. It would be a happier world if the devil had made her more female."

He came into the open as he spoke, leading the newly shod horse. He had paid the smith liberally for his pains, and he led the horse towards his travelling companion. Henry Elizabeth felt that it was due to himself to put up a bit of bluster.

"Have you to know," he said, wagging his head menacingly, "that you must pick civil words of the Queen when you use the West Country, and have you to know, further, that you must pick civil words when you speak with me."

The nonchalant lady listened with a grave coolness to the



flood of the young man's words. Then she turned her head in the direction of her companion and said something in a low voice that was clear enough for Henry Elizabeth to hear although he could not understand it, because, it being in some foreign speech, he could make neither head nor tail of it. The case of the gentleman addressed was evidently very different; his smile showed that he understood and was diverted. The Braginton humour suddenly fumed into a drunken fury. Henry Elizabeth glared at the man with a savageness which had no staggering effect, and he spoke in a voice that he took to be mighty masterful.

"You, sir," he said, "that grin so like grimalkin, tell me what the lady said that I may grin, too, one way or the other."

The gentleman looked at him with an air of polite pity.

"You are somewhat indiscreet," he said dryly, "not to say ill-bred, to challenge thus the private speech of a lady to a friend. But I see no harm in translating the drift of it. She finds it a pity that one who is so well featured and figured by nature should prove, in his conduct, so pitiful a clown, and she regrets, for the sake of her sex, that so unmanly and so unmannerly a rascal should carry a woman's name."

For a few moments Henry Elizabeth stood staring at the speaker after the delivery of this speech. His slow wits had been tickled for an instant by the praise which, it seemed, the fair lady had accorded to his outward seeming, but they were instantly tricked into passion by the taunts which followed it. He strode, with a blazing face and an uncertain gait, towards the cavalier, who was by this time preparing to assist the lady to mount the newly shod horse, and crumpling the big fingers of his right hand into an alarming prodigy of fist, he shook it menacingly in the stranger's face.

"Hark'ee!" he cried hoarsely, "pretty mistress may say what she pleases, if I care to make her pay forfeit with a kiss or so. But if you choose to repeat it, I shall choose to break your face."

The gentleman did not seem to be at all alarmed by the young West Countryman's sudden assertion of violence. He aided the lady to her saddle, and then, still holding his own horse by the bridle, he stared into the flaming face of the young Squire of Braginton with a countenance from which all human emotion seemed to be discharged.

"Cry you mercy," he said calmly. "I understood just now that you asserted gentility. Are you too much of a bumpkin not to know that a gentleman is therefore Armiger, which is, as who should say, arm-bearer or sword-carrier? And that such an one exonerates a quarrel with his own hand, indeed, yet not with a bunch of knuckles, but with wrist and steel?"

Henry Elizabeth gibbered in vacant rage at his enemy, for so he now decided him to be. He did not very clearly understand what his enemy was talking about, but he did very clearly understand that a man, who was patently less than half his bulk and probably less than half his strength, was making game of him, was laughing in his face. His silly undisciplined spirit swelled within him beyond restraint, fanned to effervescence by the statue-like tranquility of the young lady.

"By God!" he growled, "I will punch you into a blood-pudding, until pretty mistress, yonder, squeaks for your pardon."

As he spoke he shortened his arm for a moment with the evident intention of delivering a smashing blow upon his adversary's nose. But that same adversary, without moving a muscle of his calm countenance, raised a searching hand to the cloak that lay across his saddle and, with great promptness, produced and presented a pistol at the flaming visage of Henry Elizabeth.

## CHAPTER III

### A LESSON IN FENCE

**I**N spite of himself Henry Elizabeth recoiled. For all his doggedness, he was not so much of a countryman as to ignore the existence and the possibilities of a loaded dag.

"Brute force," said the gentleman blandly, "can be overcrowded by science. Before you can break my face, I can blow yours out of recognition. Here is the triumph of the mind in man over the monster in man."

Yet, although the gentleman spoke thus assuredly, it seemed as if he were likely to be overparted. For the smith, who had followed the brawl with attention, now swung up his hammer and strode to the side of the Master of Braginton, with the air of one that proclaims, "Here is your backer." As for the women, she that lolled on the gate-post shouted some words of encouragement to her side which nobody heeded, while she that calmly sat upon her horse showed no sign of emotion at the play that was being played before her.

But the stranger did not seem in the least perturbed when the smith thus thrust himself into the scuffle. As deftly and as easily deliberate as before, he plucked from his riding cloak a second pistol, and so stood with a death-dealing weapon in each hand, facing with unostentatious indifference the pair of giants that menaced him. For a moment the opposed forces stood motionless. Then the cavalier suddenly lowered his extended weapons.

His disciplined, unvexed, well-balanced senses had made him aware of significant sounds which had, as yet, made no impression upon the heated bloods of his antagonists. Before either of those antagonists could take any advantage of their opponent's sudden cessation of menace, they themselves were aware of the fall of hooves in the lane advancing on Braginton

village, and in another minute a party of four horsemen rode into the open space in front of the smithy and drew rein in evident surprise at the scene which they beheld. The newcomers were plainly men of something the same rank or life as the first arrivals and were all well habited. They were all somewhat younger than Henry Elizabeth's opponent and were all as well armed as he.

Henry Elizabeth turned a blazing face of rage upon these newcomers. It was not that he resented their presence as timely aid to the mocking gentleman against an allied assault by himself and Jonah Copping. The Master of Braginton was never one to need backing in a brawl, and if it were to be a case of four to one on either side he would have decided unhesitatingly that the balance of favour should go to the enemy. For all that he was far from sober—though indeed his wits were clearing with controversy—he would have allowed Jonah Copping no share in his quarrel. But he hated the newcomers just because they were friends of the daffing, drolling gentleman and the pale, disdainful lady.

Wherefore he stared at them with a widening clearness of vision, and found his freshened senses angrily distinguishing their appearance. One was a thin being, with dull hair and a butter-coloured face. The next was as plump as the other was lean, and as ruddy as the other was pale. The third and fourth were markedly alike in build and tincture, both being spare of shape, with black hair and sallow faces.

Whatever their difference of appearance, they had this in common that they did not give Henry Elizabeth a twentieth part of the attention that he had given to them. Their aim was all on young Braginton's enemy, and they showed their swift appreciation of the situation by a no less swift readiness to pull pistols from cover and take an overmastering hand in the game. But the first cavalier, slipping his firearms back into their places, restrained with a gesture his well-timed reinforcements.

"Easy, friends, easy," he commanded, with the same steadfast carelessness which had marked his whole carriage since first he had come to Braginton. "We have here no more than a little misapprehension, which a few words will lightly dissipate."

"What is the pother?" asked one of the newcomers. "A

fellow by the roadside told us of your mishap and directed us to the forge, where we come, as it would seem, in good time."

"I do not think," said Henry Elizabeth's adversary, "that our dispute would have been pushed to extremes, and I am confident that this young gentleman, though he does not seem very reasonable, would have been persuaded to listen to reason."

The gentleman turned from his friends and addressed the bemused and furious Master of Braginton.

"We can now," he said tranquilly, "abandon an unattractive discussion as to the superiority of mind over brute force. You assert yourself to be well-born, and if you claim that I have given you cause of offence, I am willing to accord you the satisfaction that one man of honour is always ready to deliver to another—the satisfaction of the sword."

Henry Elizabeth flamed redder than the best pippin in all Devon, for he knew enough to know something of the unfamiliar customs of gentlefolk. He knew, too, that he had no sword at his girdle, and he knew, too, that he had no manner of skill in its use. His enemy seemed to note his lack of equipment, with his habitual cold ease.

"I perceive," he said, "that you are, for the moment, unfurnished with that weapon which distinguishes a gentleman from a clown, but I would not so far trouble you—if indeed you seek satisfaction at my hands—as to have you hasten to Braginton Manor to unearth your rusty blade. Here is a friend of mine who will be happy to lend you all that is necessary for an honourable encounter."

He swung, as he spoke, to the nearest of the newcomers, who with his fellows was staring with no little astonishment at the unexpected scene.

"Prithee, Nick," he said, "suffer me to present to your favour good Master Henry Elizabeth Braginton, a West-Country gentleman of a great spirit, that has a month's mind to make me know my place. And I further entreat you, for the love that you must needs bear his girth and inches, that you will accord him a lease of your sword and dagger for the space of a few minutes."

The stranger spoke with a perfectly grave face and with all imaginable sobriety of voice, yet what he said seemed to tickle the four horsemen mightily, for they swayed this way

and that in their saddles with unrestrained laughter. Then he whom the grave gentleman had addressed drew his blade from its sheath and his dagger from its house, and leaning a little forward in his stirrups, held the two weapons by their metal to Henry Elizabeth, who moved forward slowly and took hold of them sheepishly enough.

Indeed he was little used to such playthings, as the manner in which he handled them made plain. He had been given some rough lessons of swordplay in his boyhood, but such scanty knowledge of the sword as he had then acquired had grown woefully rusty from disuse. His unreadiness was as plain to the smith as to the others, and Copping drew Henry Elizabeth a pace or so apart and whispered to him.

"Shall I rouse the country-side against these jackanapes," he asked. "Shall we dust their coats and crack their crowns with good Braginton cudgels and the devil take their tooth-picks."

The Master of Braginton shook his head decisively.

"No, no," he answered, "I am a gentleman, as he says, and I must face him as a gentleman should."

With that he quitted the smith and walked very determinedly towards the stranger, who was waiting upon his leisure.

"Let us lay about us as soon as you please," he said, with a voice and a manner that he strove to make as gamesome as possible.

"At your service," replied the gentleman, and gave his weapons to the air. The youth surveyed them with the ill-concealed disfavour that the most pugnacious may well accord to unfamiliar engines of injury.

"Asking your pardon," he said, and was angrily conscious that he spoke rather to gain time than from any real desire for the knowledge he sought, "I have given you my name and my station. Will you not give me the like?"

For all that he was ill at ease and busy with his own discomfort, Henry Elizabeth was not so alertless or so heedless of the stranger woman who was watching him not to fancy that a shade of emotion that might well be surprise, suddenly troubled the white mask of her face. But there was no similar shadow on her companion's face.

"You act very rightly," he declared composedly, "and your demand is no more than just. Wherefore, to make a beginning,

let me present myself to your simple dignity. I am Sir Guy Warwick, very much at your service."

And here the saturnine gentleman, with a changeless face, made Master Braginton a grave obeisance, such as would have suited any court in Christendom. Henry Elizabeth returned this courtesy all the more awkwardly because of the scarcely restrained snigger with which it was greeted by the little group of cavaliers. For the life of him Henry Elizabeth could see nothing whatever to laugh at.

"As for my friends here," the stranger continued, "suffer me to present them to you each in his turn, taking them as they sit from left to right. The first"—and he indicated the man with the saffron visage—"is Sir Charles Martel. The second"—and he gave a turn of his head towards the fresh-tinted, well-fleshed cavalier—"is Sir Pepin Little. The third"—and he glanced at the nearest of the black-avized riders—"is Sir Havelock Dane, and the fourth is Sir William Orange."

Each of the gentlemen grinned flagrantly as their leader presented them by name. Each of the gentlemen inclined in his saddle as Henry Elizabeth clumsily saluted him.

The ironic gentleman now glanced at the woman of his company where she sat apart in the chill of her indifference. It seemed vaguely to Henry Elizabeth as if there were now something of a change in the expression of his eyes. If there were any such change, it was a change for the worse.

"There remains only the lady," he said, "and there is no reason why her name should be withheld from your bucolic dignity. Therefore, I tell you freely that she is known to her friends as Morgana le Fay."

Henry Elizabeth, listening bewildered to the stranger's speech, noted without noting, as it were, that its suavity masked an acid flavour. Henry Elizabeth, now proffering a lumpish salutation to the fair lady, noted without noting that the transient look of surprise on the girl's face had faded as swiftly as it had appeared. He noted without noting that the gravity with which the cavaliers made their bows and received his courtesies was the gravity of stifled mockery. He did not dream that the high-sounding names which rang so briskly in his ears were chosen at all adventure by the brave gentleman from his memories of the story-books. It was therefore with an increased sense of his own dignity in finding himself in such distinguished

company that Henry Elizabeth prepared to take up a task which he knew to be bitter, though he did not know it to be ridiculous.

He made a great sweep with his borrowed sword and a great flourish with his borrowed dagger, and, in obedience to some dim memory of his old time lessons, he straddled his legs asunder and assumed what he almost believed to be the correct attitude of a serious combatant. Nothing in the demeanour of his adversary served to disconcert this belief. The grave gentleman saluted gravely with his blade, and in another moment he and Henry Elizabeth crossed swords.

Only perhaps the poet who picked the strife of the mice and the frogs could hope to do honour to that astonishing combat. The Master of Braginton was desperately in earnest and charged at his adversary like a bull, with lowered head and his extended sword and dagger for unequal horns. That same adversary, without moving an inch from his stand, received the charges with a bearing and a countenance that never shifted a line from its rigidity. Again and again the sword of Henry Elizabeth was picked from his unskilled fingers and sent whirling into the air. Again and again the point of his opponent's blade pricked him—and did no more than prick him—on every vulnerable part of his body. It was soon as plain, even to the stolidity of Henry Elizabeth, as it had been plain from the beginning to every other person present in that limited arena, that the young Squire was as completely at the mercy of his opponent as if he had been a very small mouse and his opponent an unusually large cat. The grave gentleman could have despatched his massy adversary a dozen times over in the course of their brief encounter. Henry Elizabeth's big body was smarting all over with pin-pricks, but his pride and his vanity seemed bleeding as with mortal wounds.

He was as hot and angry as any bear that he had ever helped to bait, and for all his strength and lustihood he was, by reason of his unpractise in swordplay, growing very short of wind. Then the grave gentleman, either because he took pity on his plight, or because he was weary of the sport, lowered his hands to his sides and courteously called a halt.

"Young sir," he said amiably, "it is plain that we are most unequally matched. For though you are, it may be, some six times as powerful a man as I, yet you must see by now that



your strength is of no avail, in this business, against my skill. I could go on for long enough, while you, though we have made no more than a beginning, are sadly blown and jaded."

He said all this with no sound of scoff in his voice, but rather with an air of friendship that galled, it may be, his hearer the more.

"I am no such a fool," Henry Elizabeth said sourly, "as not to know when I am beaten. I am also no such a fool as not to know that it is easy to lose a game of which one does not know the rules. Also I am no such a fool that I cannot learn the rules of any game I clap my mind to."

"Many a man," said the grave gentleman drily, as he put up his weapons, "has tried to fashion a silk purse out of a sow's ear, to cite a homely adage, but few have made a good job of the attempt."

"Why should I not be one of the few?" Henry Elizabeth challenged fiercely. The grave gentleman only shrugged his shoulders for answer, as he turned to mount his horse. Henry Elizabeth swung round so as to face the lady as she sat in her saddle.

"Shall I make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, lady?" he questioned hotly, and his ruddy cheeks deepened as he found himself thus addressing her and staring at her, and his brainpan was as thick with bewildering thoughts as a kettle with fish. The lady returned his gaze without interest.

"Heaven help you," she answered coldly, "to a better knowledge of your own mind. Please yourself. I care not."

She turned her horse as she spoke, and set off at a brisk pace along the lane towards the highway. Her companion was by her side in an instant, promptly followed by the four horsemen, each of whom, in departing, favoured the Squire of Braginton with an extravagant salutation of a plumed hat.

As the cavalcade disappeared in its dust, Henry Elizabeth glared after it with a blazing face. His spleen strove in vain for words to embody his confused objurgations. There was no spittle to moisten his dry tongue. His great hands hanging by his sides were bunched into monstrous fists that he now found impotent to menace or to strike. His breast heaved with indignation; he found it difficult to keep the tears from his eyes. He was sorely weary, and he raged and was ashamed to be weary from what seemed so pitiful a cause. But his spirit was

vexed and fretted beyond his body, with the disdain of the smooth gentleman and the scorn of the fair woman. Half consciously he told himself that he had grown old and weak and useless.

The smith came from the door-post to which he had hitched his bulk at the latter end of the brawl. The smith's sister came from the gateway through which she had watched, with a cat-like silence, all that had passed. One on one side of the youth, one on the other, the big man and the big woman offered a measure of comfort, of consolation, each eager in assurance that Henry Elizabeth Braginton of Braginton Manor had come off an easy best in the bickering with the strangers. But it seemed that Henry Elizabeth was in no mood for comfort or for consolation.

"Let me be," he commanded, shaking them away from him impatiently. All the drunkenness had ebbed out of him, leaving him steady on leg and clear in speech, leaving him, too, with a doggedness of determination that was unfamiliar to his cups.

The smith gave a significant glance at his sister which hinted, and even seemed to command, compliance with the young Squire's wishes, but the woman had it in her own mind to comply and needed no urging. Wherefore she made no attempt again to link herself to his arm, but stood aside and observed him quietly.

"Let me be," he ordered anew, and then finding that no attempt was made to restrain or hinder him, he swung sullenly on his heel and tramped slowly up the lane in the direction of the Manor House.

Copping's gaze followed the burly figure with a look of disquiet on his burnished face.

"He is carrying a black devil pick-a-back," he said to the woman in a low voice, though Henry Elizabeth was by this time well out of earshot. "I have never or seldom seen him in such humour, and while it rules him it were best to let him be."

The woman seemed to be scarcely heeding her brother's speech. Yet she repeated the last part of it mechanically, as she looked after the angry man.

"Best to let him be," she echoed. Her voice was quiet enough, but her lips were tense, and there was ferocity in

the warm darkness of her eyes. "Best to let him be," she repeated. She passed quietly enough through the garden into the house, but her right hand closed and clasped as if she were holding a knife very tightly by its handle.

The smith drew the back of his hairy hand across his hot forehead. He was mighty displeased with the happenings of the afternoon. Nothing that served to stir the Squire of Braginton from his habitual sloth and easy good-humour was at all to his purpose, but he was too shrewd to strive, just then, to combat the influence that had pricked the youth into rage. "Best to let him be," he said once more, as he assured himself of the presence in his pocket of the precious piece of paper. Then he returned to the shade and the ale, and thereafter to a nap.

## CHAPTER IV

### HENRY ELIZABETH REFLECTS

**T**HE feet of Henry Elizabeth were heavy as he walked slowly—indeed almost he shuffled—up the lane towards his house. Furthermore his heart was heavy; also his head was heavy. It had been an afternoon of staggering experiences. He had been openly put to shame on his own domain of Braginton; he had been derided and defeated under the eyes of his sweetheart, by one that had not half his bulk or half his strength. He had been king of the castle in Braginton ever since his fifteenth year. Where was his kingship now, his proud command, his unquestioned authority? Surely in the dust at the feet of the smith who had witnessed his humiliation. Yet though these thoughts troubled him sorely, they made not the whole, nor, by a great deal, the most of his trouble. On the ground of his heart care squatted, and she wore the face of a fair woman whose pale face and haunting eyes defied him. He raged at himself to have proved so poor a thing in her presence. If he might have tackled her companions all together with his fists and sent them sprawling; if thereafter he might have caught her in his clasp and kissed the pride out of her; if—an impish procession of tantalizing, unrealizable “ifs” derided him.

An earthquake, rending the kindly Devon earth and spreading ruin through the plenteous fields, could scarcely have affected so great or so unexpected a change in his existence. Up to that same morning he had ever considered himself, as others considered him in the little dominion of Braginton which was his world, one of the most fortunate of men. He was young, he was strong, he was healthy and wealthy, and he believed himself wise. The shining eyes and the pinking cheeks

of the fair she-swains of the country-side gave him eloquent assurance that he was esteemed to be comely. He was no careless spendthrift, for, as he sturdily believed, his needs were comparatively few and relatively simple. He was a large eater and drinker, and he loved to eat of the best and drink of the best that the West Country could offer, but he cared little for fine clothes or fine linen. Honest homespun served his turn for the rough country purposes which he served. All that he cared for was to follow the silver heels of the sylvan goddess of sport—he had caught the phrase from Parson, heedless of its meaning—to ride and sail, to trap and fish, to take his triumphant share of wrestling and cudgel-play and fisticuffs at all the neighbouring fairs. His desires were easily gratified by rustic dalliances. It never occurred to him, or to those with whom he dwelt, that his way of life could be accounted mean, dull, and compact of grossness.

He did not now, in his confused considerings, hold his habitual usage cheap, or view it with disfavour. He had never known any other fashion of living, and it had suited his vigour and his simplicity. He would have been well content to continue in it always, as is the vain aspiration of all men who live a life that pleases them. But the doings of the afternoon had dissipated his tranquillity, by making him aware, whether he would or no, of an unfamiliar way of existence and unfamiliar fellow creatures. He had indeed seen travellers before, but without paying them much heed, and he had rubbed shoulders with gentlefolk, now and again, at fairs and markets, but they were for the most part not unlike himself, countrified, simple, content. Yet he cared little for their company, and he shunned the better sort who might, as he feared, claim superiority, and he was always happy to be back in Braginton where he was without question the first man. He had never before this day seen such men as his adversary and his adversary's friends, with their rich outlandish garments, their foreign manners, their punctiliousness, their ironic discretion, their elusive, fantastic speech, their unhallowed skill with weapons that abated the pride of strength.

But when all was said and done, it was the woman more than any or all of the alien men that had flabbergasted him so mightily. Up to the hour of encounter he had honestly believed that the smith's sister had the best looks of any wo-

man in the world. In his calendar of rural amours he could find no dairymaid to compare with her, and he entertained with complacency the thought of making her his mistress. Now behold that his black-locked, ruddy-cheeked sweetheart was in a twink dethroned, and a pale-faced, brown-haired, disdainful creature reigned in her stead.

He had never seen such a woman before; he had never tasted one that seemed to belong to her order of being. There were men, he reflected incoherently, of no more than his own age, who could look in their memory's gallery of passions upon many such pictures. He wondered thickly what it must be like to love and be loved by such a woman. He wished dimly that it were possible for him to make the experiment. And so, with a mind humming with muddled fancies, he came to the Manor House.

He was met on the threshold by one that had been lolling at ease in the parlour, and had spied him through the window coming up the path. With his tankard still in his hand he had sauntered across the cool hall, at so leisurely a rate of progress that he passed through the doorway as the Master of Braginton was mounting the steps to find himself face to face with his chaplain.

Parson Eldwood was a squat, paunchy man, with a face as sanguineous in the mass as a raspberry, but mottled in patches to a deeper purple and plentifully embellished with pimples. His mean little eyes peeped from their pockets of bulges and puckers with a leer that was intended to be at once a challenge and a congratulation. He was clad in shabby black with a ragged cassock bespattered with greasy droppings of food and gummy trickles of drink, and his whole appearance denoted one whose body was as seldom cleansed on the outside as it was often filled in the inside with good cheer of meat and liquor. He stood, or rather he oscillated, between the doorposts and rolled his inflamed face to and fro sideways, while he held his uplifted beaker in greeting with a hand so unsteady that some of its contents slopped over the lid and splashed upon the floor with a sickly crimson stain.

"Ha! happy lad," he gurgled, and believed that he had made a good beginning, allowing himself neither the leisure nor the perception to note that the carriage and countenance of his patron accorded in no manner with his adjective. The Par-

son had passed his lonely morning in potations as steady as they were varied, ranging from ale to malmsey and from sack to brandy, with the result that, as he might have said if he had been sober enough to criticise his condition as that of another, he could not tell a bee from a bull's foot.

He grinned hideously as he spoke, and guiding his goblet with difficulty to his lips, tilted it with so much unexpected dexterity that though a major portion of the contents soused his unsavory beard and soaked his dingy bands at least some measure of generous fluid found a sluice in his burning throat.

Henry Elizabeth came to a halt and eyed Parson Ephraim Eldwood with a wholly unfamiliar and unexpected disfavour. Here was a man whom he had known from childhood, who had been the teacher of his youth, the companion of his manhood, the dweller under his roof, the sharer of his board, the keeper of his cellar, the guide of his daily life and the confidant and counsellor of his amours, and behold, it seemed to him as if he beheld him for the first time. All that was foul in the creature's person, all that was filthy in the creature's garb, all that was sickening in the drunken suggestiveness of his speech, asserted itself to Henry Elizabeth with a rawness of novelty so horrible that he recoiled, as he might have recoiled if he had encountered upon his doorstep some monstrous figment of imagination, some basilisk or dragon or vampire. He realized with a dull surprised sense of loathing that this ugly, gibbering, besotted thing was the accepted playmate of so many years, was the welcomed playmate of the years that were yet to come. His head ached with the trouble of his thoughts; his heart seemed to split behind his ribs. He was reminded suddenly of a snake that he had once seen sloughing its skin in a coppice, and felt conscious of a painful liberation.

He advanced upon the parson with such an unexpected menace in his look and carriage that the astonished man rallied sufficient measure of sobriety and prudence to give way before him.

"Stand aside," he commanded hoarsely. "I am in no humour of liquor-loose talk, I can tell you."

Indeed, it needed not the assurance of Henry Elizabeth's words to convince the parson's momentarily quickened intelligence that something had gone wrong with his young master, and that it was best to let him have his way. There was a

frown upon the young man's face that was as full of warning as a black sky is full of rain.

So he lurched on one side and leaned against the doorpost, while the drooped hand allowed what was left of his drink to trickle over his dirty shoes. Henry Elizabeth shouldered past him through the way he gave without another word, and Eldwood, now almost sober with astonishment, heard him tramp heavily across the hall and thence tramp heavily up the oaken staircase towards the floor where his bedroom was. The heavy sound of those treading feet had long ceased to resound over the stones or echo along the panelled corridors before the parson found sufficient energy to reel within doors and totter into his armchair in amazement.

Henry Elizabeth flung himself into his chamber and cast himself face downwards between the four posts of his bed, that creaked and shook under the impetus of his volleyed weight. In that bed Henry Elizabeth had been born; in that bed his begetters had died, and their predecessors for many a generation. But never before in all its history had it served to solemnize a stranger birth and graver death than at that moment. The young Master of Braginton lay there, the prey to such a travail of body, such a rending of spirit as he had never dreamed could visit contented mortality. The fumes of his dissipation that still hummed in his head and curdled in his stomach seemed to emerge from his person, assume a kind of spectral likeness to himself and then vanish suddenly as a shadow that is man's mocking likeness vanishes when the sun slips behind a cloud, or a light is suddenly puffed out. The figure that sprawled upon the bed was dimly conscious of some change inexpressible in words and scarcely expressible in thoughts, which promised to mean much, though how much he could not guess. Afterwards, when he was wiser, it came to him that he understood better what men meant when they talked of miracles, but also that he understood better what women meant when they talked of labour and delivery. He lay there silent for an unmeasurable stretch of time, between consciousness and unconsciousness, until the moment came when he felt that he must needs arise and buckle his new body and his new spirit to their new business.

Below in the cool parlour Parson Eldwood steadily drank and unsteadily meditated, if indeed the muddled movement



or jumble of his thoughts could be blessed with the sacred name of meditation.

He kept asking himself, as stupidly as persistently, what could have happened to his pupil, in the evening and the night and the morning that he had passed abroad, to have wrought so great a change upon him. At last, puzzled and drunken, he lapsed into an enduring doze, from which he was awakened by footsteps on the stairs and in the hall, and then the door opened and Henry Elizabeth entered the parlour and faced the parson's sleepy stare with a pleasant reassuring smile.

If the parson was greatly cheered by the changed demeanour of the Master of Braginton, he would have been less exhilarated if he could have divined the decision which had brought about that change. All he knew and all he cared was that the youth from whom he had parted in a foul humour had now returned to him in a fair weather mood. The grim clouds had vanished from the noble forehead; his patron was gay and gamesome; the parson's stirring appetites saw prospect of a jovial dinner and a jolly night. It might even be that in the course of the feast or the subsequent carouse he might learn something of what had occurred so to overcast his companion. But even this seemed by the way when compared with the plain fact that Henry Elizabeth was amiable again, affable again, ready as it seemed to eat and drink and be merry with the familiar gusto. The parson's senses were too thickly clogged for any whispering voice of wisdom to hint that some meaning more than usual was masked behind the returned and more than common hilarity of his master. But a definite meaning did lurk therein: a decision to which Henry Elizabeth had come in that stormy period of doubt and rage and anguish when he had lain prone upon the ancestral bed.

Although Henry Elizabeth was a grown man and come to his full physical strength, his mind was still little wider than the mind of the turbulent, ebullient schoolboy, rebellious to discipline. His ideal of the happy life was to have his own way; his ideal of freedom was the liberty to kick his heels as he pleased in any pasture that pleased him. As there was none in Braginton to gainsay him, at least to his face, or to guide him save by guile, he had rollicked in dissolute liberty from the days when his chin began to pimple. It was this same untutored, unfettered, unlettered spirit which now had first tempt-

ed him and then almost instantly compelled him to effect a revolution in his life. The primary form of insubordination in the schoolboy's mind is the desire to play truant, to slip, with one's courage in one's hands and one's heart in one's mouth, from the tyranny of detested desks with their pestilence of ink and paper, to that sunlit world of stolen holiday where every field is an orchard, where every apple turns a ripe desirable cheek to the ravisher, where every tree is brimmed with birds-nests and every nest is piled with eggs. Such was the aboriginal spirit which now set Henry Elizabeth's blood a-tingle.

In a word, Henry Elizabeth had made up his mind to run away. He had sickened, all of a sudden, of Braginton; even more sourly than he had ever sickened of a schoolroom. He hated the place and he hated the people in it with a foolish rage that had only blown into flame because his drunken mood had made him the victim of a better man than himself. The thought of such a set of words as that—"a better man"—whipped his pulses to frenzy. He could not sit down under the thought; he would not bear it tamely; therefore he had tuned himself to a great resolve. He would go out into such poor parcels of the world as might lie beyond the borders of the West Country. He would travel their wastes with the tenacity of a hunter, and his quarry should be a certain sneering, jeering, fleering gentleman, who knew how to handle a sword, and a certain fair, disdainful lady. What he should do when he had found either or both of them he did not delay to consider. It was enough for him that he wished to do this thing to make him instant in doing it. He was sworn to himself to go forth from Braginton at once, in search of some solution of the two great problems that racked him. One of these he knew to be revenge: the other he had not yet the hardihood to name with the name of love.

He found himself sizing the parson up with a growing disfavour which the dingy churchman was much too heavy with drink to appreciate. Perhaps the Master of Braginton was not a little puzzled at his new aversion to a swinishness which he had found companionable enough for many a long year. That drabbed fellow in black, with his swollen face and his slobber mouth and his swimming eyes, had been his father's school-mate; had been brought by his father's favour to Braginton to shepherd the Braginton flock and school the heir to the

**Manor.** If the shepherding had been simple even to scantiness for the sheep, the schooling had been simpler and scantier for the scholar. Parson Eldwood, mindful of the future when his pupil would be Master of Braginton, let the lad do very much as he pleased and reported mendaciously to his parents on his magnificent progress. He made no conscious attempt to corrupt the youth's nature; he was too idle minded for that. He was simply content to let him run wild and develop himself as the devil and his own inclinations might decide. Which was why Henry Elizabeth had found him, up till now, a very commendable companion and comfortable crony. Which was why Henry Elizabeth now regarded him with a physical and mental nausea that bewildered him.

## CHAPTER V

### CHICK OUT OF SHELL

**I**N all this tumult and turbulence of spirit Henry Elizabeth gave very little thought to the woman who had been so much to him but a short while before. She still meant something to him, so he assured himself, but there was never a woman in the world that should stand in the way of any purpose of Henry Elizabeth of Braginton. Especially no one that carried a pale disdainful face, shaded with dark hair. It was with no thought of her in his mind, so he told himself, that he was setting about on an unexpected adventure. It was only the man that made him brisk to move, the man of the daffing speech, the man of the matchless hand, the man who had been bold enough to put the dare upon him, the lord of Braginton. He would show that same fine gentleman what a fool he was, and it was of no importance in any way that the detested fine gentleman had a woman in his company who happened, by the grace of God, to be beautiful. Henry Elizabeth felt of a sudden sour against women. If he had no kindness in his heart for the strange lady, but only a wild desire and a wild rage, he had little kindness in his heart for the woman he had solicited so assiduously through many weeks of spring and had won on an eve when sorrow made the victory trivial.

Always accustomed to follow his mood and to please his whim, it did not occur to him now to check his purpose or to consider what consequence it might have upon other than himself. The events of the previous day were blurred in his mind as the images of a drunkard's dream. Had they been brighter than they were, had he awoken reasonably sober, as was his custom after any evening's revel, he would scarcely have allowed clearer knowledge to interfere with his immediate pleasure. But the happenings of the past night were shielded

from him by a long and sodden sleep. When he tried to remember clearly his head ached, and because he resented headache he ceased to try. The one important thing in the world for him was that he was resolved to change his scene, to try his fortune in that far off land of London, and to prove to a certain scornful gentleman—and thereby, it may be, to a certain scornful lady—that there was nothing which he could not do if it pleased him to give his mind to it.

At the same time he had enough of his wits about him to realise that his intention might be more agreeably carried out if it were carried out in secret and in private. He abhorred a bawling woman, and perhaps the woman might bawl. That the smith would bluster was nothing to the purpose; was he not at least half again as strong as the smith? But parson, if confided in, would be sure to suggest himself as a companion on the escapade, a suggestion which seemed curiously distasteful.

The young lord of the manor now made the first move in the game he was about to play. He sent a servant down to the smithy with a message to say that he was feeling weary and would make a long sleep of it until next morning. He left it to be implied, though he did not directly say as much, that he would come round then as was his custom. Thereafter he challenged the parson to a game of bowls, and though he played abominably, because his mind was abroad, the crafty cleric took care that he should end a winner, amidst the vociferous plaudits of his reverence for the young man's sure hand and true eye. There followed an early supper—ordered early because Henry Elizabeth professed an appetite which he was very far from cherishing. His one wish and resolve at this banquet was to send the parson to bed dead drunk, and this purpose was not hard to achieve. Though his reverence had a well-seasoned head, and was soaked with old wine in every inch of his unwholesome rotundity, even he had his limits of continued intelligence which Henry Elizabeth did not find it difficult to force him to pass. Seeming to drink deeply himself—although Henry Elizabeth, by way of caution and from recent distaste of drink, consumed far less than his familiar portion—he plied the parson assiduously with the hottest and strongest of the cellar, until, after an assault that was sustained for a couple of hours, the parson's wits surrendered to the attack, and he was carried to his bed, purple and gurgling,

in a state of coma. Henry Elizabeth was left to himself and his schemes.

Painfully, in the seclusion of his chamber, by the beggarly illumination of a horn lantern, Master Braginton made a survey of his wardrobe, weighing its value and estimating the likelihood of his needs. He had guessed enough already to appreciate that his sturdy country clothing was not of London fashion. But he decided that its honest alliance of good homespun and true leather should serve his turn for the journey. There was no difficulty as to what he should wear in the great city or on going to Court—for Henry Elizabeth had made up his mind that he was going to Court, and entertained no doubt that he, as a sound West Country gentleman, would be welcome there. Here to hand was the habit of plum-coloured velvet, that it had done his young heart good to wear on his coming of age, and which he had never, or seldom, worn since that memorable day. There was, indeed, a matter of a wine stain or so, and here and there some pearlings of grease; but nothing, he assured himself, to hurt, nothing that a little care and warm water would not remove when he landed in London Town. These, with a little change of linen, made up as much baggage as he cared to carry.

The matter of his garb being settled to his satisfaction, he bethought him that there was the case of the conduct of his household during his absence to consider. He found ink and quill and paper with no little pains, and with greater pains he addressed himself to the writing of a letter to goodman parson, who seemed inevitably destined to act as viceroy in his absence. After much cudgelling of his wits and some small scratching of his poll, he managed to indite a letter, laboriously penned, grotesquely spelled and laconically curt, in which the parson was informed that the Master of Braginton was imperatively called abroad for a season, during which season goodman parson was to look after and administer the Manor of Braginton to the best of his ability. Where he was going or for how long were matters which he kept discreetly to himself. No lover essaying a sonnet to the lips, eyes, or any other portion of the anatomy of the well-beloved could have been more troubled by the task or spent a more arduous hour over its execution than Henry Elizabeth, simply appointing his deputy. But he got it done at

last, and looking at it in the dim light, found that it was well done. It did not occur to him that Parson Eldwood was scarcely the man to whom it was wise to commit the charge of an estate. He had no one else for lieutenant, and indeed, in his eager mood, he cared little what happened at Braginton Manor so long as he carried out his headlong purpose.

It was not, however, wholly headlong. Though he was determined on it and would not have been persuaded from it by all the wisdom in the world, he was not prepared to plunge into his enterprise without such advantage as he might gain from commendable advice. His mother had told him that if ever he wanted counsel and friendship, he was to consult Master John Pancras, the retired mariner and Levantine merchant who lived on the hill overlooking Tor Bay. When Henry Elizabeth was left parentless he allowed this piece of advice to lie unheeded. Why should he ask for counsel that knew his own mind so well? Why should he solicit friendship that was his own master and could pick his own friends as he pleased? And so the years went on and Master Pancras might have lived in another planet for all that Henry Elizabeth knew or cared. People may dwell in the same countryside for an age, and seldom or never encounter if their ways of life lead them to different beats.

Now, however, in his new perturbation of spirit, he recalled his mother's advice, and remembered the name of John Pancras, and he resolved to have a word with him before he quitted his native country.

For the smith he left no message, nor did he leave a message for the smith's sister. It did not occur to him that he owed either any account of his whim. Whatever feeling he had known for Zillah Copping seemed, all of a sudden, to have grown grey and unreal. His blurred memories of the previous night were too incoherent to trouble him. They were probably pleasant memories enough, but carrying with them rather a sense of favour conferred on Zillah Copping than conferred by her. Anyhow, she certainly, so he assured himself, would have no cause to be lonely during his absence. She was the admired of all the countryside. There was Tobias Flood, for instance, the trawler of Brixham, who very openly adored her, and to Henry Elizabeth's certain knowledge had wooed her to be his wife over and over again.

Even now, in the midst of his occupation, Henry Elizabeth was minded to laugh at the thought of such a pair as Tobias Flood and Zillah Copping making a match of it. Honest Tobias Flood, the devout, dull, simple man, was not to be envied, Henry Elizabeth reflected, if he were tied to such a black devil as the smith's sister. A glorious girl for a jolly man to romp with, for a jolly man to kiss, but surely the worst wife in the world for such a steady sobersides as Tobias Flood. Having come to this conclusion, Henry Elizabeth dismissed the subject from his mind, having matter more momentous to occupy it in the shape of a pale disdainful face, garlanded with brown hair.

It was grey dawn when Henry Elizabeth had completed his preparations for travel. Never in his life, that he could remember, had he made so late a vigil. Drunk or sober, he was ever an early bedster, and now the unfamiliar light and the queer noises of a waking world and the chattering of the birds troubled him and almost frightened him as unfamiliar things will do.

But he pulled himself together, cheered himself with a great draught of strong waters, lifted his pack on to his shoulder and carrying his boots in his hand, crept softly down the stairs into the hall. He had made pretence of bolting the great door on the previous night, but had cunningly left it unbolted, so that now it was easy for him to open it and thereafter close it behind him with little or no noise. Thence he crept to the stables, where he sat on a trough and pulled on his boots. Then he saddled his nag, who greeted him gladly for all he was so unexpected. He led his horse by a line of bye-ways that skirted and avoided the smithy, until he came to the thickness of a little wood. There he tethered his steed to a tree, hunched himself, comfortably muffled in his cloak, against the trunk of an ancient elm and incontinently fell fast asleep.



## CHAPTER VI

### PANCRAS THE TRAVELLER

**A**SLOPE of cliff rose from the centre of the crescent of the bay at a little distance from the shore. On the summit of this cliff Master John Pancras, a Devon man, had built a dwelling that was a marvel to the countryside. It was shaped and coloured in a Moorish mould, and it stood in and above gardens and terraces green with olive and aloe and cactus. And this wonder-house was well walled and guarded so that its owner dwelt in a gilded isolation.

In the early forenoon of the day that followed upon the brawl at Braginton smithy, a young man of lusty build and ruddy hair ascended this hill on foot, dragging after him a reluctant steed. The way was devious, and the visitor, for all his youth and for all his vigour, was a little short of breath when he reached the summit and found that his nose pointed directly against the great bronze door of the mansion.

A horn hung by a chain from one of the door-posts. He blew thereupon a lusty blast, and in a few moments the door was swung slowly open and a negro, clad in cloth of silver, showed himself in the opening.

"My master," said the black man, in very passable English, "expects you, O son of dignity and honour, and bids you be welcome."

"How in the fiend's name," Henry Elizabeth asked himself, "could a man who lived on the top of this hill be expecting a visit from one that had only made up his mind to seek him a few hours before?"

While he thought this, the blackamoor, with gentle servility, took from his hands the bridle, motioning the while to Henry Elizabeth to enter the house. The young man crossed the threshold and found himself in a noble hall, devised and

furnished after the fashion of the Orient. Here he encountered another black fellow, this one habited in tissue of gold, who, bidding Henry Elizabeth to follow him, led the way up a spacious staircase.

It seemed to Henry Elizabeth, as he mounted the stately steps, that he heard some faint sounds above him as of feminine whisperings and feminine titterings. It seemed, further, to him that on glancing upwards in pursuit of these indications, he caught a glimpse, and more than a glimpse, of certain female forms habited in diaphanous garments of oriental guise. But if he did indeed discern such houris, the uplifting of his face caused them to scatter and vanish.

"What a devil!" Henry Elizabeth murmured to himself, as he reflected upon this fantastic apparition. "Master Pancras spares no pains to make his life a pleasant one."

Now Henry Elizabeth had always thought that the standard of living at Braginton Manor was as high as heart of man could desire, and it irked him oddly to find how pitifully it was belittled by the opulence of this eastern pavilion of Master Pancras. He had, however, little leisure to indulge his vexation, for by this time his guide had brought him to an upper floor through a noble garden room into a further chamber, the like of which he had never seen before.

It was very high and wide, and it had a row of noble windows which commanded all the spacious beauty of the bay. Rich tapestries clothed the walls; the floor was strewn with costly rugs, and it was all furnished in a fashion that was at once very splendid and very strange. The place was littered with outlandish weapons of fantastic shape. Great maps lay about displaying all the known and unknown corners of the world. Two large globes of Earth and Heaven flanked a table heaped with mighty books, and at this table the master of the house was seated.

This was a jovial gentleman, clad in chestnut-coloured velvet, who seemed, by the grizzle of his hair, to carry the weight of more than middle age. Yet the ruddy freshness of his colour would scarce have shamed a lad of twenty, and contrasted oddly with the frost of his pointed beard. He now rose to his feet with elaborate politeness.

"Henry Elizabeth," he said, "you are very welcome. I expected a visit from you this morning."

Henry Elizabeth felt that he was in the presence of uncanny power, and he furtively crossed himself, to be on the safe side if the power were evil. Yet the source of his host's knowledge was simplicity itself. He had been looking on the water a few minutes before and had seen the young man toiling up the steep ascent to his gates, and had recognised him as he would have recognised any other man of Devon within the compass of a score of miles. But such small mystifications diverted him.

"You seem surprised," said Master Pancras complacently, "but nothing is surprising to him who hath gathered wisdom from travel and seeing of the world. And what may be your business with me?"

The native shrewdness of Henry Elizabeth overcame his sense of surprise.

"If your wisdom could tell you that I was coming to visit you this morn," he said slowly, "then it may very well have gone further and given you the occasion of my visit."

Master Pancras smiled in his beard at the unexpected alertness of his visitor.

"My friend," he said, "I am too busy with my studies to dissipate any of my time in superfluous speculation. It was enough for me to know that you were coming here this morning. But I fancied that your visit had something to do with a woman—a woman with hair less lively than your own. Am I mistaken?"

He saw plainly from the manner of his guest that his chance shot had gone home.

It was not a very adventurous guess. When a full-blooded young man comes to an elder with something on his mind, it is a thousand rose nobles to a penny that his trouble wears the name of a maid. And when the young man has a carrot-coloured poll it is no rash deduction that the woman may very well be of another favour. When further the elder knew all about the smith's jet-headed sister, his hazard was of the easiest. He noted with amusement an increased deference in the glance and carriage of the young man.

"My business," he said, after a little hesitation, "may or may not have to do with a woman of whatever complexion, but when all come to all, the pith of it is to ask you a simple question. My good mother—heaven rest her soul—always told

me that if ever I found myself in a difficulty how to act, I should make bold to come to you in her name and seek your advice."

"Your mother," said Master Pancras gravely, "was a most fair and commendable female, remarkable for her beauty in her youth, remarkable for obstinacy at all seasons of her career. I may frankly confess that some thirty-odd years ago I entertained a very lively desire to marry her. She was pleased to find me too old for her taste, and too wild for her liking, and too poor for her comfort. You may stare at this latter objection, young gentleman, but it was soundly founded in those days when I carried but a few coins in my pouch and seldom carried them long. So I went to the Indies to make my fortune and made it and came back to find that your mother had married your father—an honest good man of his kind, but something sluggish of disposition and with no illuminating parts—and that you were well on your way to enter this world of wonders."

Henry Elizabeth grinned appreciation of the tale, but having nothing particular to say, said nothing.

"As your mother urged you to come to me in case of need," continued Master Pancras, "that shows that she had some good regard for my judgment which I am glad she did not evidence sooner. I am prepared to like you for her sake more than I can honestly say I like you for yourself. Reading as I can on the book of your countenance, I discern there a quantity of the most uncommendable qualities—such as lust, appetite, greed, pugnacity, which since I have somewhat outgrown these several passions, it becomes my age to condemn."

Henry Elizabeth could not but note that there was a twinkle in his host's eye which seemed to deny and deride his admonitions.

"I never thought to act upon her advice," he said, "for I always held that I was better fettled to give advice than to take it, and that I could always shape my own course on land and sea without guiding word from another."

"A very pretty spirit indeed," Master Pancras agreed placidly, "but one not uncommon to youth. And what, pray, was the simple question you have come hither so hot of foot to ask me?"

"It is just this," said Henry Elizabeth, with a sudden flash on his face. "Is there anything better in the world than eating and drinking and wenching?"

The elder leaned back in his chair, huddling himself comfortably in the folds of his furred gown and laughed loud and long, with a heartiness even greater than was to be expected from his cheerful seeming. He laughed till the tears distilled from his clear eyes and rolled, like little pearls, over his rosy face, while Henry Elizabeth gaped at him in amaze. Then, all of a sudden, he stayed from laughter as abruptly as he had begun, and, drawing himself together, leaned forward on the arms of his great chair.

"There, young gentleman," he said, "you have bluntly put before me a problem which has puzzled philosophers and perplexed simpletons since the dawn of time."

The visitor felt somewhat sulky, and indeed looked somewhat sulky at his host's hilarity.

"I am neither a philosopher nor a simpleton," he asserted, "yet I think that there must be some straight answer to my straight question."

"Why," said Master Pancras gravely, "to speak simply for myself I can only say that I have been blessed with a good stomach for victuals, a good head for liquor, and a good disposition for women, for which three blessings I am heartily grateful, but nevertheless I have found some finer uses for life."

"What do you mean by finer uses?" the young man queried. The elder looked at him with a whimsical smile.

"Why," he replied, "any man with some fire in his clay is not content with the satisfaction of meat, drink, and the rest. He wishes, it may be, to win renown in arms, or statecraft, or letters, or the church, or as I have done in my small way by travel, or he may cherish no more than the desire to shine in the eyes of a woman."

He looked keenly at his hearer as he spoke the last words, and the young man coloured.

"There may be," he responded, "someone whose good opinion I should like to earn——"

Master Pancras interrupted him quickly.

"My poor youth," he said, "I verily believe that you are

in love, and I fear me that I can guess the object of your passion."

Henry Elizabeth shook his head, but Master Pancras went on without heeding him, remembering the smith's sister.

"Let me warn you, my young friend. Love of woman—love of one woman, that is to say—is a sad gamble if you take the matter seriously, as I think by your mien you do."

Henry Elizabeth nodded and Master Pancras gave a little sigh. "Be advised by me and shun the serious mood in the wooing of woman. Put case that you win your sweetheart, how long can you be sure of keeping her? Your radiant angel may prove to be little better than a devil on better acquaintance. Or you may hold her for bedfellow and board-fellow for many a long year, thinking finely of her, only to learn of a sudden that she has fooled and cheated you all the while."

"You would not speak like this," cried Henry Elizabeth hotly, "if you had ever seen the woman who lives in my mind."

Pancras looked at the youth shrewdly, perhaps aware that his guesswork had misled him, but nevertheless he continued his exhortation.

"Tell me, young friend, have you ever heard tell the tale of Melusine?"

"No," was the young man's answer.

"It is a good tale and a quaint and a fanciful, of a knight that visited a lonely island wherein there was a loathely she-dragon, who told the knight that if he would but kiss her slobbered jaws she would be freed from enchantment and become the loveliest lady in the world. There is more of the tale, but no more to my purpose, which is to assert that in most of life's love-stories the fool marries the fair lady and finds the damnable dragon."

"You are too wise for me," said Henry Elizabeth, "but a man must take his chance."

"He is luckiest when he does not get what he wants," persisted Pancras, "for then his dream does not become a nightmare. There was never yet a woman that was the better by keeping. Where you wooed and won you are like to pay for your winning with sickness of disappointment, with bit-

terness of ingratitude; the golden dawn ending in the blackness of darkness."

"You do not know the woman I have in my mind," the young man muttered, doggedly repeating himself.

"I know all kinds of women," Pancras insisted gaily, "and the only wise way in the wooing of them is to remember the old adage which speaks of safety in numbers. If you can give your affections to several sweet shes at a time, as is"—he paused and corrected himself gravely—"as has been my practice, you will have less chance of disappointment than if you fix your fancy on a single object."

Now, though this had been the young man's creed until no later than yesterday, he found himself resenting it very hotly to-day and the more contradictorily resolved, with every word that Master Pancras spoke, to pursue his pilgrimage.

"What you say may be very wise," he replied, "but I have got a whimsy into my heart or my head which will not let me rest until I have tried to humour it. Therefore it is in my mind to journey to London and see what fortune may befall me there."

Master Pancras, thinking it might indeed be well to send the young gentleman away from his present surroundings, encouraged him.

"London," he said, "is a very fair and amazing city. I find myself more at my ease now in my West Country, but if I had your sturdy youth and your hot blood and your comely person I should make for London Town with whistling lips."

"That settles it," said Henry Elizabeth cheerfully, "I have acted as my mother bade me in seeking your advice. Whether I like it or like it not I have done my duty. For the rest my mind is made up and I go to London Town."

Master Pancras looked at the youth with that blend of admiration, envy, and amusement with which the elder, who has played the most part of the play, regards the youngster who is hot to take his cue and plunge into the hurly-burly.

"What do you propose to do when you get to London?" he asked. "Have you friends yonder? Have you money in pocket?"

"I do not know a soul in London," said Henry Elizabeth stoutly, "but a true man can make friends wherever he goes. As for money, I carry a sufficient store with me, and I count

to get more from one Cheltenham, a goldsmith, who has funds of my father's and, in consequence, of mine, in his hands. So that, I take it, I shall have no need to stint or starve in London."

"If you mean Master Oliver Cheltenham," said Pancras, "I know him well and will write you some words to him to say that you are indeed the man you claim to be, for he is cautious in all matters, and it might irk you to wait until he was sure of your identity. It is well that you are provided with money, but it needs more than money to bring an unknown provincial to favour in London."

"If I carry a queen's name," said Henry Elizabeth boldly, "I should be well seen by the queen."

"All who carry a queen's name," said Master Pancras drily, "are not kin to the queen. To fare well in London you need the strength and succour of some friends in the capital who can give you cool counsel as to how to carry yourself."

"Good lord!" Henry Elizabeth ejaculated, "I never thought that I should need other help than my own hands and my own heart could afford me."

"Youth must be served," observed Pancras with a sigh. "It will pleasure me very greatly to forward your bouncing manhood. I will instanter write you a letter to Master Cheltenham, together with another to a friend of mine who could guide you well, if he takes as kindly to your viznomy as I begin to do."

Master Pancras seated himself at a desk and busied himself with pen and paper, while Henry Elizabeth sprawled his legs and thrust his hands into his breeches pockets and longed to whistle but durst not for manners' sake. The old gentleman had soon finished his writing, and rising, extended a brace of letters.

"Here," he said, "is a letter to Master Cheltenham which will serve to identify you. And here is another to my good friend, the mirifically gifted Doctor Dee, that famous adept in the Great Curiosity. If you have the good luck to please him he may give you wise counsel."

Henry Elizabeth took the letters with some mumbled words of thanks, and thrust them into the bosom of his jerkin.

"Honoured, sir," he said, "the business which bears me to London admits of no long delay. So I will now be jogging."



"My son," Pancras said gently, "for in a sense I hold you so, I wish you well in your adventure, which it may be that a pocketful of gold pieces will rather help than hurt."

As he spoke he was about to thrust his hand into his pouch. But his guest stayed him with a vigorous shake of the head.

"Not so, by your leave," he protested. "I carry with me all the road-money I need, and enough wherewith to serve my turn in London Town till I become acquainted with Master Cheltenham. But there is one favour I must beg of you, and ask your word and your hand upon it."

"What do you desire?" Master Pancras asked kindly.

"When it is known that I have gone from hence," the young man said, "if any should question you will you give me your word that you will disclose nothing of your knowledge of my whereabouts?"

"I promise," the elder said heartily, "and there is my hand upon it."

As he spoke he clasped the young man's hand warmly. Then Henry Elizabeth was wafted from blackamoor to blackamoor to the society of his horse, and at once began picking his way down the winding path of the rock to take the Exeter road.

## CHAPTER VII

### HOW HENRY ELIZABETH CAME TO EXETER

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH did not feel himself truly embarked upon his adventure or delivered from pursuit and annoyance until his knees were pressing his nag's sides on the Exeter Road. He was still, in his way, of such a childish disposition, for all his power to domineer, that he had a sort of schoolboy dread of the appearance in his path of the parson or the smith or the smith's sister. Each of the three had some kind of right to call upon him to return, although Henry Elizabeth would not have returned for a thousand golden crowns, far less for the admonitions of Eldwood, the menaces of Copping or the blandishments of Zillah. He knew that the hour was still so early that even when his absence was known—and it probably would not be known for some time as the parson was like to sleep late after last night's potations—he would be out of reach, even if those from whom he was hurrying guessed that he had taken the road to London, and there was very little likelihood of their making such a guess.

With every inch, foot, yard, of the highway covered, his spirits lifted brisker and brisker, so that in a little while he was whistling the tune of a countryside ditty and had well nigh forgotten Braginton and all his known obligations thereto, of which he now took little heed. He seemed as if he had been born again the while he buffeted the blithe air, and if ever he suffered himself to think of those he had left behind it was only as a man may think of the burrs that he picks from his coat and casts to the earth.

He knew too little of what had happened the night before the past right to let it have any influence upon his purpose

or his mood. He had always been too much used in his pitiful little kingdom to exercise unquestioned sway, for any perturbations of conscience to trouble him in this hour.

It was still early day when Henry Elizabeth clattered into Exeter and rode up the High Street. Exeter was a familiar town to him for its markets and fair days, and for clothing and victualling and the filling of his cellars. On an ordinary visit he would naturally have steered his course to the "Bird in Hand," the chief inn of the town, where the local gentry resorted on gay occasions and where travelling gentry of importance invariably put up.

But as Henry Elizabeth, with his mood of the truant school-boy still upon him, was unwilling to advertise his presence in Exeter to those who would know him, it behoved him to find another halting place to bait his horse and refresh himself. Henry Elizabeth's stomach by now cried cupboard as lustily as if it had never fasted before. Casting about him in his mind he recalled a certain obscure hostelry in a side street, where he might find what he needed without much chance of recognition. Thither he now directed his somewhat jaded steed, and in a few minutes after his arrival in the town he came to a halt before the "Green Man."

Master Braginton was too good a sportsman not to see to his horse's comfort before his own. But when his nag had been housed and rubbed and watered and fed, he saw to his own comfort with a generous mind. Having eaten his fill and drunk his full he found himself confronted by a dilemma. Should he stretch his legs on the settle in the inn parlour and indulge in a nap before resuming his journey, or should he walk abroad and take the air?

He hesitated. The cool darkness of the inn parlour suggested drowsing after drinking. Yet outside, through the open window, the dancing spring sunshine spoke to him with that voice of the open air which was more wooing and winning than the whisper of sleep. Physically he was tempted to slumber, after an uncomfortable night and the agitations of an unusual adventure. But the claims of sloth were combated by an unfamiliar claim which urged him to go out of doors. And to this claim, not understanding, he hearkened and obeyed.

He strolled into the street again and retracing his steps of entry moved through the crowded thoroughfare past the

Guildhall. Half consciously, half unconsciously, he was making his way in the direction of the cathedral. He had a vague idea at the back of his mind, which was neither a godly mind nor a spiritual, that it might be both good and wise to seek a blessing upon his enterprise in the Cathedral Church of the chief city of the West Country. Thus it came about that he turned presently from the High Street into a narrow gut of land and so into the open space, girdled with houses, where the great cathedral stood.

Henry Elizabeth always assured himself later that when he undertook that walk to the cathedral he was inspired by a consciousness that something of moment was going to happen to him. It may be that his belief in the inspiration followed upon its realisation, though indeed a confidence in such prognostications is part and parcel of the world's rough wisdom. Be that as it may, he came to a halt before the cathedral with a tingling of his senses, physical and spiritual, which caused him to regard that crowded company of kings and saints in stone with an unfamiliar astonishment and an unfamiliar awe. And while he stood thus, a woman came out of the great church, and at sight of her Henry Elizabeth felt like a pillar of fire, for he knew her for the Lady of the Forge.

If he knew her as they came face to face, she knew him, for her pale cheeks went paler as his red cheeks went redder. But she gave no other sign of recognition and was for going away as composedly as if the man standing there in the March sunlight owned no bodily existence upon earth. But Henry Elizabeth was not to be so ignored. He was swayed by an incoherent belief that fate had been gracious to him, that the unexpected thing, the unhoped-for thing, had for once been vouchsafed, and that it was his part to take advantage of the occasion or to sing small for the rest of his days. He reflected later that it was not necessarily miraculous that yesterday's travelling party should have chosen to halt at Exeter or that, this being so, he and the woman should have encountered in the narrow compass of a small town. But it seemed miraculous at the moment and as such to be accepted. So when she would have passed him, he swerved a little so as to stand before her, barring her path. And she had perforce to come to a halt and to stand and look at him, which she did with a frown.

"You see, lady," Henry Elizabeth said, with a boldness which surprised himself, "that we meet again."

"I see as much," said the girl gravely, "but it is a matter of little moment and does not call for speech between us."

Again she made as if she would go on her way, and again Henry Elizabeth, much to his own after astonishment, stayed her progress and spoke.

"It may be a matter of little moment to you, but it is of great moment to me. For I should not be here if it were not for you." He was so eager to speak that he barely noticed a momentary expression of anxiety that might easily be the herald of alarm. But his eagerness was not so nimble as that of the woman.

"Are you spying upon me?" she questioned, so fiercely that for an instant Henry Elizabeth was taken aback and almost prepared to give ground. But he rallied, seeing the absurdity of the challenge.

"God knows I am not spying upon you," he protested, "and God knows I had no knowledge that you were here in Exeter. But I am here in Exeter because I travel to London, and I travel thither because the hope of my heart is that I may some day see your face again and hold better speech with you than yesterday's."

The girl seemed moved a little by the vehemence of his speech and the eagerness of his eyes and the oddness of his declaration.

"You are a strange youth," she said, "and I know not what to make of you. But if you are indeed foolish enough to travel to London with any thought of me in your mind, my best advice to you is to turn in your tracks, and ride home again and stay at home till bedtime."

There was a note of bitterness in the voice which pricked and puzzled Henry Elizabeth. But standing thus face to face with her, she seemed so ravishingly enchanting—for all her uncanny gravity and sadness—that the actual meaning of her words made no deep impression upon his mind. Forgotten was his past, his pleasures, his duties; everything was forgotten save the one fact that God had been pleased to bring him at all adventure once again into the presence of her whom he knew to be his heart's desire.

"I would ride to London," he said hotly, "if there were a

devil at every bridgehead to stay me, and if at every ford there were a Saint Christopher stationed, not to carry me across but to stop me from crossing."

This simile came to his unlettered head naturally enough, for on the walls of Braginton Church some old-time artist had painted two pictures of Saint Christopher playing the pack-animal to an accompaniment of mermaids, fishes and other sea-creatures. But the girl's lips smiled a little at it and her eyes widened at the youth's exuberance.

"God have mercy on you, young man," she said, "what would you and I have to do with one another in London?"

"That is for me to find out," he answered doggedly. "You deem me a clown and a fool and it may be I am both. But I mean to be less of each or I mistake my will, and when I am trimmer of body and brisker of wit, it will be no more than manners if I seek you out and thank you for waking me up."

Forgotten indeed Braginton and the smithy, and the smith and the jet-headed wanton that was the smith's sister. All that was of last week, last month, last year, last century. Time began for Henry Elizabeth with the coming of the woman who now faced him under the shadow of the ancient saints and the ancient kings. He was so earnest and so straightforward in his speech, and so simple and honest in his carriage, that he seemed to move the woman more than one more sophisticated might have hoped to do.

"You talk like a madman," she said, "and yet I do not think you are mad. You must go your way and I may not gainsay you. But you would be mad indeed if you sought to go where I go. Wherefore I bid you farewell, for we shall not meet again."

While she was speaking, her hearer suddenly remembered that the reason which he had alleged to himself for his sudden and secret departure for London was a desire to square accounts, sooner or later, with the merry gentleman that had mocked him so by the forge. Of course he knew now openly, what he had known all along clandestinely, that he set out on his travels for the sake of this woman. Well, he had told her so, and that was so much to the good. But she had brought his enemy back into his mind and so moved him to a new way of speech.

"The man that was with you yesterday——" he began, and then felt suddenly at fault and halted. The girl looked at him with a frown.

"What of him?" she asked. Henry Elizabeth was silent for some troubled seconds, while he strove to sort his tossing thoughts.

"Is he anything to you?" he asked at last, after what seemed to him an age-long meditation.

"We travel together," she answered coldly, and said no more. But this was not enough for her companion.

"Are you bound to him in any way?" he asked. "By any tie, by any pledge, by any promise?"

"You are curious, my friend," he girl answered, between frowning and smiling.

The young man nodded cheerfully.

"I want to know," he declared, and seemed to think that this declaration settled the business.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked. "What concern is it of yours?"

"What concerns you concerns me," he answered sturdily. "But if I have a fine liking for you, I have no such kindness for him, though it may prove, in the long run, that he did me a good turn with his lesson. Still, if he is very dear to you, I might withhold me from hurting him, and yet I hope he is not very dear to you."

"You talk like a crazy-pate," she retorted, "when you talk of doing him any hurt. Take wise advice and keep out of his path, for you will not thrive if you seek to cross him."

"That is as it may be," the youth said composedly. "But you have not answered my question."

The girl's face showed more of a smile than he had yet seen there.

"He is my master," she asserted; then she added, "But he is not very dear to me."

He felt a sudden cheer at her speech, which must have shown itself plainly in his face, for she spoke again quickly, without a smile, imperiously.

"This should not and must not matter to you," she said, "we are not likely to meet again."

"Leave that to me," he answered confidently. At this she frowned.

"You are a fool," she said, "and if you do not have a care, you may come to be sorry for your folly. Now I must go."

"May I go a little way with you?" he pleaded. "I have much that I want to say."

"You can say nothing that I want to hear save 'good-bye,'" she replied. "You may not walk with me and you may not follow me. This you will obey as you claim to be a gentleman."

"You must hear me now," he said authoritatively. "You say we shall not meet again. I have my own thoughts about that, for I have made up my mind otherwise. But lest what you say should come true, I must ease my heart and make bold with, 'I love you.'"

The girl broke into a bitter little mirthless laugh that troubled him. He had never told a woman a love tale with so much diffidence and yet with so much earnestness before, and it was new to him to have his declarations treated with any touch of scorn.

"Dear lord!" she cried, as if she were speaking to others, "the good gentleman loves me and cannot choose but tell me as much." Swiftly she addressed herself directly to the youth. "Young Sir Countryman, do you think so meanly of my poor merits as to believe that I have never been wooed before?"

"Surely no," he answered. The thought in his mind was that she had never been wooed by Henry Elizabeth Braginton before, but he felt unexpectedly unready to say as much. So he said instead that, to his mind, no one with his wits about him could look at her without loving her.

The girl laughed again.

"Perhaps so and perhaps no," she said, "but I should not thank every man to tell me so, and indeed I do not thank you. Love cannot grow to speaking-point in a single night."

"I tell you it can and does," he persisted. He was irritated by her contradiction which only served to make him the more stubborn in his conviction. "I tell you that I love you, and there's an end. You shall know that I tell truth, sooner or later."

She looked at him, mockingly, through narrowed lids.

"What do you mean by 'love'?" she asked. The question took him somewhat aback. But yesterday he could have told,



at least himself, very clearly what he meant by love. But to-day his mind was in such a muddle and his spirits in such a stir that the answer seemed more abstruse. As he said nothing, the girl continued:

"Do you mean just what most men mean when they say they love?"

"I speak for myself," he answered sturdily, "when I say that I love you, all there is of me."

"What would you do to prove this love?" she asked, and scanned his face closely as she spoke.

"Anything you please to wish," he assured her. "Shall I kill the fellow you call your master?"

"That would not help me at all," said the girl, "unless you could also kill sundry devils, worse than himself it may be."

"Why not?" he asked serenely, as if the lesson of yesterday had never taken place.

"If I told you that I loved a man, and that my lover was in danger, would you save his life if you could, and give him back to me?" the girl asked.

"That is another matter," he responded somewhat glumly, for the question dashed his spirits. "I do not love you in order to help another man to win you."

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"You are like the others," she said. "You do not love me, you love yourself. You do not know the meaning of love. How could you?"

He felt abashed, but would not show it.

"What is the meaning of love?" he asked.

"Love that is worth the name," she replied, "is willing to go unrewarded, to serve for the sake of serving, is ready to lay all its world, though it be no more than an orange nor no less than a King's orb, at the feet of divinity, never dreaming to ask anything in return."

Henry Elizabeth was frankly staggered. He had never heard of this kind of love and he did not in the least understand it. She saw so much in his face.

"If you had a thinking mind," she said, "it would do you no hurt to ponder my words and find a profit in them. But I have played the fool long enough. This is farewell. Do not be so ready to tell every strange lady that you love her."

The young man was at a loss what to say. He had made his momentous declaration, and it had produced no desired effect. Of one thing he felt sure. Here was no woman to be cuddled and cajoled into compliance, even if he were in a less public place and could make the essay. He felt unaccountably baffled.

"May I know your name?" he asked lamely. She shook her head.

"You were told yesterday," she said, "that my name is Morgana le Fay. I can tell you no more. Farewell."

She had quitted his company and was some paces away from him before he realized his loneliness; also his rage. In a few bounding steps he was by her side again. She turned on him a contemptuous glance.

"Ah! you are not a gentleman," she cried. "You cannot carry yourself gallantly."

"I am a gentleman," he protested hotly, "and even your denial shall not ungente me. But I beg you to tell me your name that I may make it my prayer."

"I never change my mind," said the girl gravely. Henry Elizabeth looked at her sullenly.

"Neither do I," he said. Of course he was lying, but just at that moment it seemed to him to be Gospel truth, for indeed as far as this lass was concerned he did not mean to change his mind and he knew that he would not change his mind. The girl moved away again and Henry Elizabeth stood still and looked after her as she went her way quickly, until she turned into a narrow way, and so passed from the Cathedral precincts and from his sight.

Henry Elizabeth returned to his hostelry in a mixed mood of soberness and exultation. He could not have put into any English at his command the elation he felt at seeing this woman again and speaking with her, and telling her something of his thought of her, even though she had flouted him and his words. But he felt that he had embarked upon a prodigious adventure which it would take even him a world of pains to bring to success. He did not entertain for a moment the thought that he might not win success after all. When Master Braginton set out on any business it went without saying that he finished that business satisfactorily. But he felt that the business he had now undertaken might

**demand a great deal of time and a great deal of patience. And he felt very impatient and mightily in a hurry.**

**With his mind in a turmoil, half joy, half sorrow, he paid his shot, drank his stirrup-cup, and swung himself into his saddle. His excited spirits spurred him and, when once more he was quit of the town, he rode like a whirlwind.**

**"London," he cried, "London," as he rode.**

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FOUR KNAVES

**F**OR Henry Elizabeth in his past, the world ended with Exeter. For him in his present the world began with Exeter, to end with London, that London which promised him revenge for bitter injury, that London which might give him fulfilment of his heart's desire. Whatever chanced he was determined to be no longer a clown, at the mercy of any man with skill to handle a yard of steel. Thus he communed with himself vaguely, while, intoxicated by the discovery that the world was wide, he lustily trumpeted fragments of West Country ballads between the ears of his affrighted steed.

When he came to Honiton he clattered up the street of the Stream of Running Water and drew rein with a sigh of satisfaction at the door of Honiton's only inn, the "Oak and Saw."

As nobody came out of the "Oak and Saw" to greet him, he dismounted leisurely, tethered his horse, and entered the open door. There was no one in the hall-way, nor in the parlours that opened off it on either hand, and—which was more to the purpose with a thirsty traveller—there was no one in the buttery. It seemed a strange thing to him that an inn should lie thus deserted on an English high-road at any time of the day. He had no mind, however, to be baulked of his purpose, and he would not have suffered himself to be restrained by any false sense of delicacy from rummaging in the cellar for himself to the gaining of good liquor. But even as he was about to decide on this course of action he was aware of a door at the end of the passage in which he deliberated, a door that swung ajar and afforded a glimpse of the inn garden, and through the open space there came,

with the sight of the grass and the flowers, the sound of certain ebullitions of coarse laughter.

"Here, at least, there is company," said the traveller, who would not willingly drink alone, so he kicked the yawning door to its full width and walked straight into the garden.

Disposed here and there about the garden were a number of wooden benches and tables, and on one of these benches, at one of these tables which was well plenished with beakers and tankards, four fellows were sitting that were laughing like horses. They were all big and brawny fellows, habited with a rough attempt at finery, and one was of a black favour, and one was of a brown, and the third was of a straw-colour and the fourth was of a sandy russet. But Henry Elizabeth did not pay them so much heed as he paid to another person present. This was a girl of a very pleasing countenance and a lively complexion of her ordinary, but just now her face was drawn and wistful and the colour had faded from her cheeks. She was dancing on the grass before the four men, who were bawling some kind of song for her to skip to, and while the girl pranced and ambled before them in a plain panic of fear, the men rocked with merriment and shouted to her to lift her kirtle higher and show more of her trim ankles.

When Henry Elizabeth entered the garden the girl, with a look of relief, stopped her exertions, but the men at the table, paying no heed to the new-comer, rattled their tankards on the board and bellowed to her to continue her capers. The new-comer caught a look of entreaty on the girl's face that moved him to pity.

"Pretty mistress," he said to the girl, politely, "Do you dance here of your own good will and at your own good pleasure?"

"Indeed I do not," the girl replied, and immediately lifted her hands to her face and began to cry. By this time the men at the table were all staring at the stranger in a kind of stupor of astonishment which for the moment quenched their laughter and also, though only for a moment, deprived them of speech. But the black-headed fellow soon recovered sufficiently from his surprise to let fly a volley of very malodorous oaths, at the close of which he truculently demanded of the intruder what the devil he meant by interfering with other folks' entertainment.

Henry Elizabeth, paying him no more heed than if he were a sparrow twittering on a twig, went up to the weeping girl, patted her gently on the shoulder to encourage her, and asked her what was amiss. The girl, between her sobs, tried to answer that all the town had gone to the church of St. Michael on the hill and that she had been left to look after the inn, with little expectation of company, but that these strangers had come in and demanded drink, and finding that she was alone, had forced her, under pressure of many terrible threats, to dance before them for their amusement.

By the time that she had got this far in her narrative the men who had so misused her had risen from their table in a very great show of rage. The black-headed fellow, who seemed to be a leader among them, called again to Henry Elizabeth, naming him a busy-body-thankless, and bidding him either sit quietly and leave them to their sport or quit the place instantly if he wished to preserve a sound bone in a sound skin.

To this challenge Henry Elizabeth did not at first offer any direct answer. He turned to the girl and bade her go within and bring him a quart of ale. Then wheeling round upon the infuriated company he invited them, one and all, jointly and severally, to go to hell. By this time the girl was making for the door into the inn, and Black-beard sprang forward to intercept her flight. But he was himself intercepted by Henry Elizabeth, who planted his left fist on the fellow's face with such weight and precision as sent him flatlings to the ground with a crumpled nose that spouted blood all over his mouth and chin and cheeks. And he lay where he fell, as still as if he were sound asleep.

When his companions saw what had befallen Black-beard they united in an ugly rush upon the new-comer. They were all broad and stalwart fellows with knives at their girdles and cudgels to their hands and at the sight of their attack the girl ran screaming for help through the inn into the street and so missed the witnessing of a very pretty piece of self-defence. For in a jiffy, as the men advanced, Henry Elizabeth snatched up in both hands one of the long benches that littered the garden and swinging it as easily as if it had been a reed, he addressed so great a blow with it, delivered sideways, upon his assailants as brought the whole three of

them in headlong confusion to the ground. Then, with a nimbleness which was scarcely to be expected from his bulk, he picked up one of the oaken cudgels that had fallen on the grass with its owner's fall, and with a most methodical rapidity distributed so sound a rap apiece to each of the three skulls that rested on the turf as sufficed, for the time being, to knock them silly. Thus it came about that when certain of the citizens of Honiton, roused by the squallings of the girl, came hurrying into the garden of the "Oak and Saw," they found a large good-humoured man seated on a table swinging his legs, and four fellows with bloody cox-combs strewn the ground below him.

The landlord and his neighbours having armed themselves, some with stout batons and some with old rusty halberds, were all for haling the overthrown rogues to the gaol-house and clapping them into irons, but Henry Elizabeth would not have it so.

"By your leave, good gaffers," he contended, "enough is as good as a feast, and I think these rascals have paid full measure for their pleasure. The damsel by her own account is more frightened than hurt"—and indeed the maid of the inn admitted that the fellows had in no way mishandled her beyond forcing her by threats to jig and caper—"and her teasers will be glad enough to sneak out of Honiton with their tails between their legs. So where, I pray you, is that quart of ale I thirst for?"

The maid, who for all her terrors had not forgotten his wish, skipped forward with a foamy jack in her pretty hands. Henry Elizabeth took the vessel eagerly, lifted it to his lips, steadily tilted it, and so stared at the sky till the last jolly drop had trickled from the flagon into his middle. He returned the jack to the girl with a sigh of relief, for he had been dry enough from travel before he had engaged in the recent tussle, and looked round him. A couple of the rascals sprawling on the grass began to show signs of coming-to and in consequence the good citizens began to draw closer together and to murmur anew about the gaol-house.

The victor was not to be persuaded in this matter. He had made up his mind how to act and opposition only made him the more obstinate.

"No, no," he said. "Fair play. I have pronounced it.

It was I that rendered an account of these fellows and I call them mine to do as I please with. And my pleasure is that they go free. So bring me hither some pitchers of that water of which you have so great a plenty that we may souce them quick again."

The speaker had a masterful voice and a masterful manner; he had a big presence and carried himself as if he were king of Devon. He had just given proof of his prowess in overcoming single-handed four rough customers, and in doing so had rendered simple service to a fair daughter of the town. All these reasons, strengthened by the display on the stranger's broad palm of a couple of silver crowns which he proposed incontinently to spend in treating the present company, had their effect in persuading the citizens of Honiton assembled in the garden of the "Oak and Saw" to agree to the proposal of their amazing visitor.

The inn-maid, who was very zealous to oblige her champion, hastened with the aid of a brace of friends to obey his request, and promptly returned from the street-stream with the pitchers of water. These Henry Elizabeth incontinently emptied over the heads of his prostrate antagonists, with such enlivening effect that in a few minutes they began to recover their benumbed senses and to sit up, one after another, on the grass and gape about them. While they were collecting their wits the conqueror requested the assembled men of Honiton to withdraw into the inn, there to drink at his expense, while he conferred with his adversaries. Also he entreated the inn-maid to bring him some goodly measures of strong wine. All these orders of his were obeyed, because the good folk of Honiton took him for some great man that should not be gainsaid.

When Henry Elizabeth was left alone with the slowly recovering rogues he set before each man a horn of wine upon the grass and bade him drink to better his case, an order which each of the bemused rascals obeyed very readily. Then their entertainer, after solacing himself with a generous measure of wine, looked down from the throne of a table on the gaping blood-smeared faces and addressed them thus:

"Drink your wine with a merry heart for I have ensured you from the gyves and the gaol in both of which the good people of this place were very anxious to clap you. For the



quarrel was between me and you and not between them and you, and even as it was I who overcame you, so I claimed and maintained the right to deal with you thereafter."

Now the fellow with the black shag that had been the first to bite the dust had also been the first to come to his senses, for he had been spared the crack on the pate with a cudgel which Henry Elizabeth had accorded to his comrades. But being of a cunning and wary disposition he had lain still and shown no signs of animation, and thus he overheard the debate between his opponent and the townsfolk and greatly approved a conduct which promised him a clean shift from the stocks, if not from the gallows. Wherefore he now rose from the ground and thanked his late antagonist on behalf of himself and his friends in better terms of speech than the listener expected to hear, expressing a profound respect for the vigour of his adversary's body and the desire to do him any pleasure he could.

"I desire," said Henry Elizabeth, "to know who you are and what is your business in these parts, for that ye are not West Country men I know very well, not only by your speech, but by your conduct; for no West Country man would offer annoyance to any woman."

If the black-haired fellow felt any temptation to smile at this assurance his aching head restrained him from such rashness, for he saw plainly that his victor was as earnest in what he said as vigorous in what he did. So he answered discreetly:

"Sturdy sir, we are not indeed native to this West Country, and in a sense we are not of any land or any shire, but count ourselves citizens of the world. Yet if we needs must wear a closer label than that, why we should call ourselves men of London."

"I am journeying to London," said the Master of Braginton, "and if I were to believe that the bulk of its citizens were of your kidney, I fear I should be put to some pains to pick my friends."

"You might have worse friends than us four," said the black man gravely. "It would not be every traveller that might enter London in the surety that he could boast acquaintance with the Four Knaves."

"The Four Knaves!" Henry Elizabeth pricked his ears

and cocked his head of one side. "The Four Knaves!" he repeated.

"Even so," said the man, "since you have been pleased to deliver our bodies, we will requite you by delivering our names. I am the Knave of Spades at your service."

He made Henry Elizabeth a fine bow as he spoke. The others by this time had scrambled to their feet, and the man with the sandy hair took his cue from his comrade.

"I am the Knave of Hearts, at your service."

He, too, saluted profoundly and left his example to be followed by him of the brown head.

"I am the Knave of Clubs, at your service."

Therewith he bowed and gave way to the straw-coloured rogue, who made a leg and proclaimed himself.

"I am the Knave of Diamonds, at your service."

Henry Elizabeth did not feel that he was much wiser than before.

"In heaven's name," he asked, "why do you trumpet such foolish labels?"

The Knave of Spades winked knowingly at his fellows, but he answered his questioner with the respect due to his strength.

"You would not call them such foolish names, my good gentleman, if you chanced to be better acquainted with the mysteries and liberties of that blessed region which is known to the simple as Whitefriars in London, but which we who are wiser, like certain Romans of old with their Capitol, call by its secret name."

"And what may that be?" Henry Elizabeth enquired, always willing, since he had set out on his travels, to acquire useful information. The Knave of Spades put his finger to his lips and shook his head very solemnly.

"Mum's the word," he answered. "You are not of the elect; you have not eaten gammon and spinach with the grandees of the pack. You have not been sponsored for ordination by an upright man."

"I do not know what you are talking about," said Henry Elizabeth, "and I warn you that if you cannot make up your mind to speak a plain speech, I may be tempted to break your head again."

The Knave of Spades made a deprecating gesture.

"To say sooth," he explained, "we belong to the honourable

confraternity who take St. Nicholas for their patron saint; in other words we are of those that would sooner prey upon others than let others prey upon us. And I wish with all my heart that we could persuade your worship to join our brotherhood, for with such strength and skill as yours you might hope in good time to become our king."

"God have mercy!" cried Henry Elizabeth in a huff, "would you have me turn thief?"

"There, there," the fellow said soothingly, "why should your honour wax so hot upon a word. I think, if one considers rightly, that there are far fewer honest men in the world than thieves, as you call them."

"Pray what would you call them?" Henry Elizabeth asked with more good-humour, for he was beginning to be amused by the fellow's drollness and boldness.

"Why," answered the Knave of Spades, "I could give them a hundred names in as many seconds, but they would be no better than Dog, Greek or Cat Latin in your worship's ears unless your worship were a free man of the kingdom of Whitefriars. But if ever you travel to that kingdom and will pay me a visit I will be brisk to entertain you in return for today's grace."

"You are very good," said Henry Elizabeth, "and it may well be that I shall pay you a visit, for I have a mind to see all sides of the world now that I am set a-moving."

"You have but to ask for the Knave of Spades at the "Pied Lion" in Hanging-Sword Alley, and if I am not instantly at hand there will be those there that will set you on the sure way to find me. And he who finds me finds my friends here, for we work for the most part together. There may come a time when your lordship shall have need of us."

Henry Elizabeth did not think it very likely, but he did not say as much, for it is never wise to rebuff a friendly offer, and he had already learned from his taste of travel that unexpected things come to pass. So he nodded his head pleasantly.

"I give you thanks for your good intent," he said, "and now I think it were well for you to be jogging. How go ye, a-horse or a-foot?"

"We go a-foot," said the fellow demurely, "like the four blessed Evangelists."

Henry Elizabeth was not over well versed in religious matters, owing to the negligence of his chaplain, but he could not believe that the resemblance cited went further than the method of travel.

"Whither do you journey?" he asked. The Knave of Spades laid a finger alongside his nose and grinned craftily.

"We never know where we are going, for we travel at all adventure, as opportunity blows us a wind. And we are all blessed or cursed with such pitiful memories that we can never remember whence we have come. But it is likely that we shall be in London before your grace who is, as I take it, travelling thither."

"How may that be?" the traveller asked, "seeing that I voyage a-horseback and you journey a-foot?"

"There are horses for us in every stable whenever we have a mind to ride," the Knave of Spades answered with a smile, and his companions, who were seemingly quite content to let him be their spokesman, grinned approval.

The Master of Braginton was a little taken aback by the frankness of his new friends' philosophy. But he was not to be tempted into any show of surprise.

"Well," he said, "if you will take my advice, you will go your road with discretion by way of the garden wall, for if you were to go by way of the inn, which is now full of people, the sight of you may stir talk again of the stocks and the gallows and the rest of the whirly-birly."

"By my pack," cried the Knave fellow, "that same gentility proves you worthy of our brotherhood. In token whereof I will give you an inkling of why we are here."

And therewithal he sang to the tune of a ballad-man.

"Jockey of Norfolk, why do you roam?  
Were it not better you bided at home?"

Henry Elizabeth stared at him.

"I am no wiser than before," he confessed. "I do not understand your rigmorole."

The Knave grinned.

"Mayhap I should not have told you if I thought you could riddle my ree. But if ever we become blood-brothers I shall have no secrets from you. In the meantime we shall fol-

low your honour's advice the more readily since thereby we shall avoid the paying of our scot."

"I will stand sponsor for your scot," Henry Elizabeth said. "And one word in parting by way of farewell. Always be kind with women, and nimble and willing in their service."

The Four Knaves grinned at this exhortation, but they saw that he meant his words seriously, and they thanked him and left him and went to the end of the garden and, helping one another, disappeared over the wall. The hero of the hour sat for a little while musing on this curious encounter and asking himself if he could find pleasure in such a life of licentious vagabondage. He decided, as he walked towards the inn, that he could not, thinking it too full of shifts and dodges and dishonourable terrors.

Passing by the common-room of the "Oak and Saw," Henry Elizabeth gave the company good day and quitting the inn, unfastened his horse and was preparing to mount when the pretty maid whom he had rescued joined him.

"I have to thank you," she said, "for the good service you did me this day. My name is Barbara Parling, if you care to bear it in mind, and I would fain know your name that I may remember it with gratitude."

Henry Elizabeth was about to answer her very frankly by yielding her his work-a-day name, but an unfamiliar spirit of caution, born of adventure and its attendant perils, prompted him to equivocation.

"Pretty mistress," he began, "if it so please you, you may call me Tobias Flood."

He chose the name almost at random out of the scores of names that were familiar to him, in and around Braginton. It seemed somehow to him that it was, considering all things, rather a good joke to make this use of the moony sea-creature, with smooth red face and curly black hair, who was understood to cherish a hopeless passion for the smith's sister.

"Tobias Flood," said the girl thoughtfully, with the air of one that commits something to memory. "It is a pretty name."

The false Tobias laughed, raised his hat to the lass and rode happily on his way. He soon forgot all about the "Oak and Saw" and did not dream that he should ever be called upon to remember it.

Somewhat to the disappointment of the Man of Devon, the

remainder of his journey to the Capital was lacking not merely in adventure, but in memorable incident. The one thing that he could recall with any sense of pleasurable interest, as he came to the end of his journey, was a snip of gossip which he heard in the inn parlour at Chard where he passed his first night of freedom. It came from a countryside fellow with a tale to tell which set all the gaffers' heads nodding. There had been according to this newsmonger, a rare case of housebreaking at a country-house in Devon within ten miles of Exeter which had lately been purchased by his grace the duke of Norfolk who, as it was reported, had been recommended by his physician occasionally to take the West Country air. It seemed that his grace had gone with a small retinue to take possession of his new property, and after a few days residence had left his mansion scantily garrisoned and ridden over to Exeter to be the welcome guest of Sir Antony Jackaway, whose son was expected home from France. At this point Henry Elizabeth, lolling and drowsing before the inn fire, began to take some notice of the tale, for he was familiar with the name of Antony Jackaway as that of an old discontented, hot-headed country gentleman. But his interest quickened as the story continued. During the Duke's absence, in the thick of night, daring thieves had entered his house, unseen and unheard by those that were left in charge, and had pillaged it very prettily indeed. A quantity of gold and silver plate of rich value had disappeared, as if whisked away by fairy fingers. The only proof that the pilferers were human and not elfin visitors was the fact that on the table in the banquet-hall someone had laid four playing-cards in a row. Pricking up his ears, Henry Elizabeth had asked what these cards might be, and the teller of the tale answered that they were the four knaves of the pack. On this hearing Henry Elizabeth found himself quickened into a temptation to whistle which his wiser judgment restrained. He understood now why his new-made friends had chosen to travel so far afield, he understood now the meaning of the rhyming tag about "Jockey of Norfolk," and his knowledge, without shocking him overmuch, confirmed his purpose of seeking the rogues out when he got to London.

## CHAPTER IX

### LONDON

**F**OR all his complacent determination to show no bumpkin-like wonder at anything he might behold upon his travels, for all his daily self-reminders that there was nothing good or fair or note-worthy in the rest of the world that could not be bettered in the West Country, it was not without a certain stirring of the senses that Henry Elizabeth first caught sight of a fringe of spires against the sky and knew that he was looking upon London. There, beyond a few more fields and a space of river, lay England's capital, the home of her kings and queens, the mistress-city of the island. He had never thought to journey thither, had never yearned to do so. But he who takes to the road widens his mind as the highways slip behind him, and the pilgrimage of the young man had worked its enlivening effect upon him. He had already learned that Braginton was not the only standard by which to measure land and water. He began to ask himself if he would now perforce take another standard than Exeter for the consideration of a city.

There was still a goodly length of highway, compassed with gay fields and garnished with companionable trees, to cover before London town could be closely neighboured. But with every length of road over-ridden urbanity began to assert itself at the expense of rusticity. The houses that arose on his right hand and on his left, in their trim and comely gardens, smacked more of the town than of the country and lay closer together with an air of civic companionship. It was not until he found himself in the outskirts of Southwark that the traveler realized that he was in the presence of the great city and became aware of its dignity.

As he rode into the High Street of Southwark he was hard put to it to refrain from displaying on his countenance his satisfaction at the noble houses on each side of the way. He was resolved that no one should take him for a booby stranger all agape at unfamiliar splendour. So he held his face as stolid as he could, but his spirit was warm within him. There was a fellow by the roadside playing on a great harp which was taller than himself. He was picking from the strings a tune with a blended plaintiveness and gaiety which somehow seemed to bring Henry Elizabeth's heart into his mouth and forced his fist into his breeches pocket that he might toss the harpist a silver piece.

In later days, when his wits were bettered and his senses mellowed, it seemed to him that his same harping and the tune which came from it had a very special meaning for his ears, calling up as it were rich and grim images and full of strange foreboding. But this was indeed no more than a vain thing, the dream-seed of a gathered aftermath.

He did not stay to garner the profusion of thanks which the harp-player lavished upon his bounty, but pricked his steed to a livelier gallop that he might the sooner realize his desire, hotter now than it had been since first he quitted Braginton, to cross the Thames and find himself in very London. As he spurred along the spacious causeway he so far forgot his rule of conduct as to gape in amazement at the prospect he beheld. There, stretched before him on the further side of the river, a multitude of houses extended to the right and to the left as thickly set as the trees in a forest. Out of the great agglomeration of buildings, which from that distance seemed so huddled together that he could not conceive the existence of streets to thread them, arose such a quantity of spires that Henry Elizabeth believed that he must of a certainty have come to the most God-fearing, devout, and commendable city on the face of the earth. He had no names to put to any of the monuments. He guessed that the great spireless edifice to his left was a temple of religion, but he did not know that it was St. Paul's any more than he knew that the other church-like structure still farther to the left was the famous Cathedral of Westminster.

He went at a slower pace over the bridge that linked south and north, sniffing with a kind of surprised relish the various



stinks and whiffs that arose from the river and the riversides, and admiring as he rode the houses on each side of the bridge that made that bridge a street. It seemed to him in a sudden thought that it must be good to dwell thus, in a roomy ancient house so poised above the rushing water. If a man must live in a city—and for himself he abhorred the thought—it were surely a mitigation of the evil necessity to be set over the surface of a current with ever a course of clean winds blowing to or from the sea.

He had scarcely time to come to this conclusion before the hind hooves of his horse clinked against the last portion of the bridge and Henry Elizabeth found himself in full London. For a moment he drew bridle and looked about him. The busyness of the place made him dizzy. People seemed to be moving with the patience, the persistence and the multitude of ants in all directions, streaming down one street, streaming up another street, some walking, some strolling, some running, all apparently very heavy with affairs.

The young man could only recall his own easy-going, jog-trot, day-in and day-out life at Braginton, as a newly awakened man recalls the fragments of a dream that are still jiggling in his head, and laughs at the memory. But if he laughed at first he was more inclined to sigh as he urged his horse to further motion. This was the place he had come in a mind to conquer. Here among these teeming myriads he had decided that he was to make for himself name and station. If anything could have shaken his magnificent faith in himself and his power to do whatever he wanted to do, that first moment of pause in surveyal of the great city would have so afflicted him. But as he spurred his steed he whistled a West Country tune, and was brisk to find himself while brisk to find his inn.

Henry Elizabeth rode into London upon a nag that was undoubtedly tired but that was still trim and sound. His good friend Master Pancras had given him at parting the name of an inn in the eastern quarter of the city where he might count on good entertainment for man and beast, and to that inn the youth, guided by question and answer as he entered the city, directed his course. It was a well known place with a well known sign, being no other than the Libbard, and when he drew rein at last at its yard gates he found that the advice of his friend had been wise. A smiling ostler aided him to dismount;

a jovial landlord emerged from his quarters to greet the guest; the display on the stranger's part of a few broad pieces ratified, as it were, the anticipated welcome. When he saw his horse securely stabled he viewed with approval an offered room and accepted cheerfully—for the afternoon was waning—the landlord's suggestions for a quickly forthcoming supper. With a head whirling with excitement Henry Elizabeth cleansed himself from the stains of travel; with a lively stomach he ate and drank; with a curious mind he assured himself that he was actually in London town.

Having finished his meal, he felt in a humour to take the air, stretch his legs and see something of the great city before night-fall. His head was already humming with the civic stir; his senses were bewildered by all the sights, sounds and smells which, as it were, flung themselves against him. Another kind of countryman might very well have consented to remain awhile in the shelter of his inn and agree to get himself used by degrees to the wonders, marvels, portents and prodigies of his new situation. But the Master of Braginton was never of that humour. It was not a few people or a little clatter or some foul odours that should discomfit him, he assured himself, and therefore he made ready to swing himself out of his inn door and into the buzzing thoroughfare with as resolute a carriage and as indifferent a countenance as if he had never been out of hearing of Bow Bells in all his days. The only question was whither he should go. The late March evening was chilly, but that did not deter him from his purpose.

The thought had entered his mind, without any depressing effect upon his spirits, that he was as much alone in London as man could very well be. He could count no human being in the great city with whom he could claim an established acquaintance. He knew nothing, beyond his name, and the address on Master Pancras' letter, of the goldsmith in whose hands lay the monies that he depended upon for his maintenance in London. He carried with him indeed the other letter of Master Pancras to Doctor Dee, but he could scarcely consider the feasibility of presenting either of these epistles that evening, as he guessed that the hour was late for such a business as he had with Master Cheltenham; and as for the doctor, he learned from his host that the famous philosopher lived in a country house at Mortlake which was a good stretch

of miles from the city and not to be considered visitable at so dusk an hour.

Suddenly he called to mind his strange acquaintances of Honiton, the smiling rascals who called themselves after the four knaves of the pack, and the fancy took him that he would try to pay them a visit. He had to cudgel his mind for some time before he could clearly recall the name of the spot where the Knave of Spades had assured him that he was always to be heard of if not instantly to be found. But in a little while it came back to him: the inn of the Pied Lion in Hanging-Sword Alley of Whitefriars and thither, in his present temper of curiosity he resolved to go.

When he enquired of his host the whereabouts of Whitefriars in general and Hanging-Sword Alley in particular the host shuddered in disapproval, and when he announced his intention of seeking the Pied Lion the host overflowed in protest. Whitefriars, it seemed, was no better than a longer word for Hell. Hanging-Sword Alley was the worst thoroughfare and the Pied Lion the most disreputable tavern in all the damned quarter. The Master of Braginton listened to his landlord's squallings with none of the alarm with which the good man of the Libbard expected to sickly a country visage. He expressed a cheerful belief that he could take care of himself even in this hellicate region whose very name stank in the landlord's nostrils, and he definitely reaffirmed his intention of steering his course thither at that very present. Whereupon the landlord of the Libbard, rendered suspicious by his guest's choice of a first walk in London town, vouchsafed him very curt directions for his journey, and stood in his courtyard shaking his head and muttering as he watched the obstinate traveller pass through the gateway into the gloom.

## CHAPTER X

### WHITEFRIARS

**A**S the traveller dipped into the dim streets that were still fairly thronged, he cast a countryman's shrewd glance at the sky, to take his bearings by the stars. He had indeed listened with indifference to his host's warnings about the dangers of Whitefriars for strangers. Confident in his strength, confident in his spirit, confident in his sword, in spite of his proved clumsiness in the use of that weapon, he made his plunge into the possibilities of the great city with as unconcerned a mien as if he were taking a stroll from Braginton to breathe the sea breezes. But behind his air of assurance, as behind his cheerful self-confidence, there lurked, to his surprise, a certain sense of awe. Here was indeed a huge hive, all humming and buzzing, and scarce a bee of all the swarm that cared a jot for him or that meant anything to him. It fretted him a little to think that if he brought the first passer-by to a stand and said to him that he was Master Braginton of Braginton in Devon the man would not care a curse for the knowledge. In spite of himself he felt a certain minishment of his dignity at the thought. But he would not suffer this to down him. He had come to London to gain an end, and that end must be, should be, gained.

It mattered nothing or little to him that the region toward which he steered had once been as holy as it was now unholy. His landlord had indeed tried, with the smallest measure of success, to interest the new guest in his history of the place, a history which it was always his delight to recount to travellers ignorant of London. Vainly did the host endeavour to conjure up before the mental vision of his guest a picture of the stately buildings, the glowing gardens, the noble churches that had at one time, and that time not so very long ago, occupied the site

which was now no better than a warren of alleys and lanes and squalid streets. Henry Elizabeth had only yawned while the host of Libbard narrated how this earthly paradise of the Carmelite fellowship had been altered, thanks to that summary justice or injustice of Bluff King Hal,—the inn-keeper altered his noun to suit the taste of his hearer—into the kind of petty hell it now was. What Whitefriars had been mattered nothing to Henry Elizabeth, and he had been brisk to cut his landlord short in his tale. It was Whitefriars in its present form that interested him, and interested him solely because it happened to house a parcel of vagabond rascals, who might possibly be of use to him in the furtherance of his purpose.

Immersed in such thoughts he crossed the Fleet Ditch unheeding and, still steering a westerly course, found himself, after sundry enquiries, drifting into that portion of the town which he sought. Though he had been warned that he had chosen to stray into a region where the purse and the life of the lonely pedestrian were in serious jeopardy, he sauntered on heedlessly with his hands in his breeches pockets, mightily pleased with his sense of freedom, mightily indifferent to any of the consequences that might arise from his escapade.

He was strolling thus contented along a particularly narrow street, which a surprised wayfarer whom he questioned had assured him would bring him in the neighbourhood of his evil-odoured destination, when his meditations were suddenly disturbed by a shrill sound which seemed uncommonly like a cry for help issuing from the dimness of a neighbouring alley. He came sharply to a halt, listened again, heard the cry renewed more feebly and then in an instant set off at full speed, disdaining the darkness, in the direction from which the appeal had come.

He found himself in a horribly black cut-throat passage between lightless overhanging houses. A pitiful lantern flickering in the wind gave him a glimpse of a confused knot of humanity struggling this way and that across the cobbles. His clear country vision discerned through the gloom that a man in rich attire was striving weakly against the hostile intentions of two strapping rascals. Instantly Henry Elizabeth flung himself into the thick of the business. Before the marauders were aware of his coming he fell upon them like a whirlwind. The pair released their victim and rallied to resist their unexpected

assailant, but in a jiffy Henry Elizabeth had caught a neck apiece with a pincer-grip of fingers and holding his foes at arm's length for fear of knifework was for knocking their heads together. But as he was about to turn intention into act a meagre ray from the mean lantern fell upon their faces and proved them familiar. One belonged to the fellow who at Honiton had called himself the Knave of Spades; the other was owned by the Knave of Hearts. He could see that if he recognised his prisoners, they had no less recognised him. Wherefore he altered his purpose as to the bashing of heads, and loosened a little his grasp on their throattles though he still had a mind to be wary.

"So, my friends," he said, "we meet again. I was even seeking you, but I find you sooner than I expected. I am glad that you mend your manners. It is better to be two to one to pluck a man than four to one to plague a woman."

"Good master," said the Knave of Spades, with as merry a grin as he could command, "you are welcome to London, where I have newly learned of your arrival——"

"How so?" interrupted Henry Elizabeth, "how could you know of my arrival?"

As he spoke he relaxed his grasp and left the pair at liberty. As for their victim, he had taken shelter in a doorway, whence he watched while he trembled.

"Do you remember," the Spade asked, "a harper on the Southwark Road to whom you gave bounty?" Henry Elizabeth nodded. "He was set there by me to spy, that I might know of your arrival, for I swear you would be a great gain to our fellowship. I guessed that you would come to Whitefriars sooner or later, but I could wish it had been later, when we had done our business which, be it said without offence, we were doing in obedience to your direct will and prescription."

"How now!" cried Henry Elizabeth. "When did I ever say word about plundering an honest burgess?"

"Not in so many words," replied the Knave of Spades composedly. "But I mind me well that in the garden at Honiton you did most severely adjure us always to be ready, nimble and willing in the service of woman."

"What if I did," retorted Henry Elizabeth. "What has that wholesome advice to do with this thievish cutting of purses?"

"More than you would think," the man replied, "for we did

what we have done at the instigation of a woman, and a pleasing wench she is and a rare coney-catcher. But I make no doubt that the good citizen whom I spy yonder sculking in a doorway will tell you more of the matter if you question him. As for your honour, if you will please to come with us we will be blithe to entertain you at the Pied Lion which is up those steps yonder."

Here there came a dismal voice from the doorway incoherently entreating the good gentleman not to abandon him in that den of darkness.

"I thank you," Henry Elizabeth replied to the Spade, "but for the present I will content myself with looking after the poor mouse you cats were mauling."

"Then let it be for another time," said the Knave of Spades. "Where does your vigour abide in London? I should have learned to-morrow, for we merry men make it our business to know who comes and goes, but it is all the better to be wise to-night."

"At the Libbard by the Bridge head," said Henry Elizabeth. The Knave of Spades nodded.

"'Tis a good inn," he said, "and I may pay you a visit there. In the mean time pray give us leave to take to our heels."

"Be off with you," said the victor, and the two night-birds vanished. Then Henry Elizabeth sought and found the victim in the indicated doorway, picked him up, tucked him under one arm and, steering by a glimpse of the stars through the almost meeting roofs, carried him into an open space and safety.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NEW FRIEND

**H**ERE Henry Elizabeth set down his charge, and the moment he had done so, the rescued man started to speak in a quick voice that was something between a pipe and a squeak and that seemed somehow to its hearer to be habitually intended to invite and stimulate an approving laughter.

"You may very well ask," he began, though his rescuer had not questioned nor intended to question, "what brings a man of my age and station into so poor a quarter of the town at such an hour of the night. But rest assured. I can answer you completely and satisfactorily in one word and that word is, 'woman.'"

The listener was startled, in spite of himself, by a statement that was at once so unexpected and that chimed so well with his own temper and case. But the speaker was far too engrossed by his private concerns to heed the effect of his narrative upon his companion.

"Yes," the man went on, "woman is my lodestar, my jack-o-lantern, my Circe that can turn me into a swine at her pleasure. Such an one I met this even in the Cheap, to my near undoing. For the wanton smiled on me and I drew her aside and plied her with fair promises which she feigned to deny, but by and by she invited me to her lodging in this quarter of the town, alleging that her drooped gentility could afford no better. So here I came, and here I was snared, and would have been plundered and belike murdered had it not been for you, my Hector, my St. George, my Black Prince, my man of men."

Henry Elizabeth cut him short abruptly.

"Hold your tongue," he said gruffly. "Do you call yourself an Englishman and make a big mouth over a straight love of



fair play. I may not be much of a Samaritan but I will never pass tamely by and see two men worrying one."

He had more leisure now, in the clearer light, to regard his new friend, and what he beheld surprised him not a little. The man was extravagantly dressed in a spirit of conceited finery that challenged, but did not always command, the admiring eye. His garments were all indeed of pretty rich substance, but so variegated in pattern, so fantastical of cut, and of so many colours that Henry Elizabeth could liken him to none other than a gaudy fellow he once saw rope-walking at a fair. Yet beneath all the splendour and defiance of this apparel its wearer seemed to be no more than a comfortable specimen of a well-to-do citizen. Under the extravagant cap a jolly, round, rosy face showed itself, that carried an habitual expression of appetite. As for the body that followed the face, it had been framed by nature for a short lean body, which had been converted by human self-indulgence into a short stout body.

"You make too little of your deed," this comical personage protested, "for it may prove more of moment than you are at this present vouchsafed to know. May I be permitted to offer some small token of my whole-hearted thanks?"

As he spoke he fumbled at the pouch on his girdle, which had probably been the main object of the rogues' attack, with the evident intention of extracting therefrom some coin or coins of recompense. But his rescuer made such a furious gesture of refusal that the fumbling fingers ceased to twitch.

"Godamercy," the West Country man bellowed, "would you offer pay to a gentleman for playing a gentleman's part? If you were a younger man and had any knowledge of my name and station you would find me harder to deal with than the rogues I scattered."

The parti-coloured personage, easily convinced of the speaker's gentility by the loudness of his voice and the arrogance of his carriage, hastened to apologize for his error.

"London," he sighed, "has changed so much that it is hard now-a-days to distinguish true man from false or gold from base metal. But I beg that I may at least be allowed, by some small show of hospitality, to prove my sense of indebtedness to a friend in need."

Henry Elizabeth took this to mean an invitation to the nearest tavern, but he soon found it was otherwise.

"I have a modest lodging at no great distance from here," the fantastic fellow explained, "and if your worship will honour me by accompanying me so far, I can promise you a sip, a sup, and a swallow, of as good a Canary as ever man tasted, and therewith a whiff of such aromatic deliciousness as has been given to none before this age, being Christian men, and few even in this age to savour."

Henry Elizabeth looked at him a trifle dully. He did not understand, and therefore did not relish, his manner of talk, which seemed to him in its lack of directness condemnably unEnglish. But he also saw, with a countryside sense of the duty of hospitality and the duty to accept it when honestly proffered, that the oddity was most anxious to make some return for the help that had been rendered him, and that it was unEnglish to rebuff such honourable anxiety.

"You are very obliging," he said, "and I will gratefully taste this fare of which you talk so strangely. Whither away?"

"If you will accord me the favour of your arm," said the man, "for I am somewhat shaken by this affray, I will be blithe to guide you to my poor abode."

It was well-nigh all he could do by standing on tip-toe to hook a fat hand into the crook of Henry Elizabeth's elbow, but he managed to do it.

They walked along at a brisk pace, the stranger swinging from Henry Elizabeth's arm like a dog on a short leash and guiding him by gentle tugs in the due course. This led through a maze of narrow streets that meant nothing to Henry Elizabeth but that seemed to mean a great deal to his conductor. In every one of them, it would seem from his account, there abode some female of peerless charms which the speaker detailed with a freedom and particularity that surprised his companion, though he was far from squeamish. Many were the tales which the fellow had to tell of his amorous adventures, most of which, however, either ended in some ridiculous discomposure of the would-be gallant or were conducted on a strictly mercenary basis. It was clear, however, that the man saw his own follies and frailties as plainly as his listener did, and was diverted by them and made them diverting.

Presently the pair emerged into a fairly wide street which the stranger afterwards knew for Fleet Street, and when they had gone a little way along it the babbler came to a halt in

front of a tall, narrow house with overhanging windows and gables peaked across the sky. The chatterer produced a key from his girdle-pouch and opened a tall, narrow door.

"My servants will be abed by now," he said, "for I love to come and go privately by nights, but I shall be proud to wait upon my deliverer."

Behind the door was a passage, dimly illumined by a flickering lamp. Master Talkative invited his guest to enter and, following him into the house, shut the door behind them. He then took a candle from a small table, lit it at the lamp, and guided his guest up a flight of tall stairs to a room on the first floor where he busied himself nimbly in lighting a number of candles.

Henry Elizabeth found, somewhat to his surprise, that he stood in a very handsome apartment which was amply and even richly furnished, albeit with something of the same extravagance of bravery that characterized the costume of its master. That master now placed himself in front of his visitor and made him a solemn salutation. Then with a wan smile he spoke thus:

"Let me present myself to you as the most comical-pathetical thing under the canopy of heaven, a discarded fool."

Henry Elizabeth gaped at him in uncomprehending amazement. The words that would have carried some meaning to a town ear fell meaningless on the countryman.

"I see you do not understand me," said the fantastico. "Well, if you will deign to sit and sip, I will make my meaning plain to you anon."

Henry Elizabeth sat while his host drew flagons and glasses from a buffet and poured out a golden wine. He pledged his visitor and then fell into a silence which Henry Elizabeth broke by reminding him that he had not yet explained the terms of his self-presentation.

"When I named myself a discarded fool?" asked the host, with a sigh. The guest nodded. The host sighed again.

"Yes," he said, with a wry smile, "I was once the favourite of princes, the butt and boon of courtiers, the terror and delight of noble dames and maidens. I have seen King Harry, heaven bless him, laugh himself nigh to apoplexy at a joke I once made."

He paused for a moment, scratching his lank hairs and look-

ing at his companion with a very chap-fallen expression, which sat oddly on his rosy countenance.

"I cannot," he said, "at this moment recollect the exact tenor of the jest. It was something to do with a horse-chesnut and a chesnut horse—there, there, I cannot recall it, which is a pity, for I swear it would have made you laugh as much as his majesty, whom indeed you favour, not a little, in the build."

"I favour him in the name too," said Henry Elizabeth, "for my name, or one of my names, is Henry."

"Lord, how you would have laughed at that joke," the man ruminated. "There never was a better jest in the world, though I say it that should not. Maybe it will come to me by and by. But indeed the world now-a-days has grown too dull to relish a man of my humour. If King Harry loved me, King Edward was too prim for my whimsies, and as for Queen Mary, there was no laughter in her for me to kindle."

Henry Elizabeth did his best to wear a show of sympathy with the sorrows of his entertainer.

"How about her present majesty?" he asked. "Has she no taste for your japes and capers?"

The ex-jester shook his head.

"Alas!" he sighed, "the name of Bartholomew Gallop means little or nothing to the Queen's grace. She is too busy with her governance of the kingdom to have leisure for the merry-making that moved her royal father. She cracks her own jests with the court wits and has no need for the assistance of your humble servant."

The guest observed, with as much feeling as he could command, that it seemed a hard case.

"It is a hard case," said Master Gallop emphatically. "Yet I must not grumble unduly. Other favourites of royalty have been treated more harshly than I. I live rent free in this house which is crown property. I have a pension sufficient for my modest wishes, and I have further a small matter of savings made in my golden days, so that taking one thing with another I do pretty well. Wine is always here. Friends are often here. Woman is sometimes here. I do not complain greatly of my lot."

"Surely not," his guest agreed. "There must be many to envy your good fortune."

He rose as he spoke, bethinking him of seeking his inn, when he remembered certain words that his host had uttered earlier in their acquaintance.

"You spoke," he said, "of a certain aromatic deliciousness. May I ask concerning its nature and composition?"

"To be sure," said Master Gallop, "to be sure. Our pleasant conversation had, for the moment, driven it from my memory. But I am glad that you recall me to myself, for now, young gentleman and thrice blessed preserver, you shall see what you shall see."

## CHAPTER XII

### DRINKING SMOKE

WITH an air of mystery the host produced from a secret cupboard in the wall a silver box and a couple of objects of which the guest did not understand the purpose. They appeared to be two longish tubes of reed or wood with little bowls at the end of them, one of which was shaped like a bird and the other like a fish. Gallop lifted the lid of the silver box and displayed something that looked like pieces of dried wood.

"Here," said he, breaking off a fragment, "you may behold the blessedest herb in all Christendom, and for that matter in all heathendom, seeing that it comes from the lands of the heathen and that it will surely in due time be welcomed for the refreshment of us Christian men. It is the mummy, as it were, of a certain marvellous Indian weed of which my good friend and patron, Sir John Hawkins, brought with him a small quantity on his return from the New World a couple of years ago. He had learned the method of its use and the manner of its benevolences from the savages of those parts, how they use it by burning and inhaling, in these little engines or pipes. Sir John, who was good enough to present me with a modicum of his store of the precious herb and a pair of these fumigatory engines, told me that, as he learned from the savage men, its fumes and odours are of sovereign influence for the clearing of the brain, the strengthening of the mind, the cheering of the spirit, and the banishment of sour humours. Though it is now so rare in this kingdom that few have heard of and fewer tasted its quality, yet Sir John, who proposes to bring greater store with him on his return from his present voyage, doth doughtily predict and maintain that in a little while all the world will be drinking smoke, for so he calls the ceremonial, which I will wager you have never witnessed before to-day."

Henry Elizabeth shook his head.

"No," he answered, "nor never so much as heard tell of it, and it is news to me that you can drink that which is not liquid."

"Shrewdly observed, young gentleman," his host said, "for indeed this precious vegetable seems in its present show and bulk to be rather an edible than a potable. But when it is rightly used you shall see that it resolves itself into so fine, so delicate, so aetherial a commodity that you would sooner speak of the drinking than the eating thereof. At least so says my good friend and patron Sir John Hawkins, whom I take to be wiser than the pair of us put together."

Master Gallop, as he spoke, inserted a portion of the herb into the bowls of his odd implements and handed one to Henry Elizabeth. The bowl of the other he applied sideways to the flame of a candle. The stuff it contained took light very quickly and then, in obedience to the suspirations of Master Gallop, a series of fine grey clouds began to arise. As these grey clouds increased in intensity the expression on Master Gallop's face grew almost seraphic.

"Heavenly," he murmured with half closed eyes, "heavenly." Then, as if remembering a hospitable duty to a guest, he seemed to shake off his lethargy and addressed Henry Elizabeth. "Will you not follow my example?" he asked. "Though I must warn you that it may make a novice a little dizzy at the off-set, it had no such effect upon me."

Henry Elizabeth ventured a disdainful laugh.

"There is no herb in the world that shall make me dizzy," he boasted. "I have the hardest head in all Devonshire, for cider, ale, wine, or strong waters."

Therewith he lifted his pipe to the nearest candle in careful imitation of what his host had done, and proceeded to set fire to the dried herb within it. Very presently the same grey smoke arose from the bowl and Henry Elizabeth was sucking and puffing contentedly, with an elbow on the table and his legs sprawled wide apart. Gallop watched him with a mild and quizzical interest.

"This is good," murmured Henry Elizabeth, after he had taken some half a dozen whiffs, "this is excellent good. I marvel me that Sir John Hawkins has not more followers."

He was soon conscious of a curious uplifting of spirit, which

inclined him to laughter without any definite assurance that he had either reason or desire to laugh. He lolled extravagantly in his chair, eyed with delight the spirals of smoke that floated into the air from the wizard instrument between his lips, and felt an odd conviction that he was somehow or other the Lord of London. At the same time he seemed as if he were, all unawares, enveloped in fog or falling snow; furthermore he found that the whole room that environed him was revolving in one direction while the chair on which he was seated seemed to be revolving in another. While he was trying vaguely to explain to his confused senses the reasons for these phenomena, the voice of Master Gallop trumpeted suddenly, cutting the muddle like thunder.

"Young sir," cried the voice, that seemed to its hearer to vol-ley from distant mountain tops, "what is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

The moment that the young man heard this question put to him, he knew that there was only one answer to it and that he was the very man to give the answer. He was ill, wretchedly, hideously ill, with a malady of which he knew not the name but of which the symptoms were both acute and intolerable. He did not know that his face had grown a ghastly white, but he did know that all his inward parts seemed to be rising in a violent insurrection against his sense of decorum. He made a frightful effort to smile as he discerned through a livid mist the anxious expression on the face of his host. As the visitor's countenance writhed, the serious expression of Master Gallop suddenly changed to one of understanding. Very nimbly he bounded to the buffet, snatched therefrom a great basin of brass and, skipping with astonishing alacrity back to the table, clapped the vessel under the chin of his unhappy guest just at the moment when outraged nature insisted on asserting herself. There were some horrible seconds of gurgle and splutter and repulsive surrender. Then Henry Elizabeth found himself leaning back in his chair, very empty and faint and jaded, and very heavy with nausea, while his kindly host wiped his lips and dabbed his forehead with a napkin that was sprinkled with some sweet-smelling essence.

"There, there," he clucked soothingly, "you will feel better after this," and he presented to the sufferer a cup containing strong waters, which Henry Elizabeth eagerly gulped down.



It seemed to put new life into him, and with the assistance of Master Gallop he was able to stagger blunderingly to his feet. Hurriedly he extended his hand towards his host in signal of farewell. But the ex-fool protested.

"Surely you will not take the road to-night after such a qualmishness? Better bide here with me. You are a thought too long for my truckle, but I will make you up a shift for a bed where you will sleep soft enough, I reckon."

For all his bulk and his sturdiness and his stubbornness, the young man felt the attraction of this invitation. He had not outblotted the memory of his upheaval, and to his troubled fancy the way to his inn seemed long and murky and tortuous.

So with a sigh of satisfaction that moved his big frame and that shook the room like a simoom, he crashed back into his chair and suffered his companionable host to fill another cup for him which he promptly emptied. Then he lurched heavily across the table, and thereafter he had but a dim consciousness of being conducted to a couch upon which he fell into a complete repose.

## CHAPTER XIII

### GOOD ADVICE

**I**T was many hours later when Henry Elizabeth recovered some measure of consciousness. His native activity asserted itself in a start of surprise to find that the full tide of the morning sunlight was flooding the room in which he lay. Then the strangeness of the room staggered him, for it was neither his familiar room at Braginton Manor nor the room at Braginton smithy with which he was too familiar. Drowsily, as past events asserted themselves upon his awakening mind, he decided that he must be in the chamber that he had hired in the London hostelry, but just as he had accommodated himself to this thought, he was roused anew from his contentment by an aggressive consciousness that the appointments of the place wherein he lay were more luxurious than seemed at all befitting to the room he had hired at the Libbard.

While he was trying to reconcile his intelligence to all these conflicting opinions he was suddenly aware of a face looming over him, a large face, a rosy face, a droll face, the face of Master Gallop.

"I trust you have slept well?" said the throaty voice of the ex-jester. "You have certainly slept long, for the hour is nearly noon."

The drowsy man swung himself, with a violent effort, to a sitting posture and pushed his tousled hair from his eyes. He saw that he was lying only partially clad upon a very comfortable couch; that his body was sheltered from the cold by a goodly bundle of coverlets, and that the clothes which had been removed—heaven knew how—from his person were lying, neatly folded, upon a chair hard by.

In a sudden gush memory of last night's doings filled the chambers of his brain. His stomach was still sour, his head

still heavy, his limbs still uneasy from the fumes of the Indian weed. He was conscious also of an emphatic aroma of strong waters.

"Give you good morning," he said to his host, and laughed a jolly laugh. Master Gallop seemed pleased at his exuberance.

"I thought it best," he said apologetically, "to let you sleep your sleep out. After a first encounter with Sir John's dainty the strongest man may, like the giant Antinous, be the better for a spell of contact with his mother earth."

Henry Elizabeth shook off his coverings, stepped to the floor and stretched himself.

"I feel as well as ever I did in my life," he declared mendaciously, "though it is seldom that I have suffered myself to sleep so late. But I will confess to you that I feel some prickings of appetite."

"That is indeed good news," said Gallop, "for it proves that the blessed herb has done you but little mischief in your first encounter. So if you are minded to break your fast——"

"Is there ever a pump handy?" his guest interrupted, "for I have it in my mind that a runnell of cold water over my head and shoulders would give me a power of comfort."

"Surely," said Master Gallop, and beckoned to his guest, who gathered up his clothes ere obeying to follow him. The pair descended some steep stairs into a yard where the guest stripped off his shirt and stood with bowed body naked to the waist, while his host pumped a steady stream of water over him. After a few minutes of this exercise, the bather stepped back, shook himself, and proceeded to dry his glowing body with a big cloth which Master Gallop had provided for the purpose.

When he had finished his ablutions, the jester conducted him to the living-room where on the previous night he had made his acquaintance with the fantastical weed. Here he found a substantial meal spread.

It did the host's heart good to behold how valiant a trencherman he entertained. But an approval of his guest's appetite was not balanced by a like approval of his manner of disposing of his viands.

The jester cherished a fastidiousness, born of familiarity with the polished manners of courts, which was offended by the carelessness and even grossness of his visitor. He ate and drank too noisily; he talked when his mouth was over-

full, and was in consequence inclined to splutter; he mingled with generous recklessness the two processes of taking in food and drink; he lolled too much in his chair, and sprawled too much over the table; in short, he committed a number of those minor offences against good breeding which rank him that commits them with the uncivilized. Master Gallop was the more amazed because he was now acquainted with his visitor's gentility, and he marvelled that one who carried an old name and came of an old line should behave himself so coarsely. Something of his disapproval must have showed itself upon his countenance, for all of a sudden Henry Elizabeth, pausing to take breath after a vast draught of ale, proved that he was aware of the critical attitude of his host.

"There is something that displeases you," he said in his direct way. "Have I said anything to vex you?"

"There is nothing," Gallop protested, "in your discourse that could do other than please. It is your carriage, if I may be allowed to say as much, which seems a thought rustic for London."

Henry Elizabeth, so far from taking any measure of offence at this speech, extended across the table a challenging hand which caught that tendered in response in a grip so vigorous that the ex-jester winced and quivered.

"You are the man for my need," Henry Elizabeth asserted. "I have come to this city to learn many things, and one of these is the way in which town gallants behave who wish to please ladies. So speak freely, I pray you, and tell me my blunders and stumbles."

Master Gallop coughed apologetically behind an uplifted hand, and made a grimace.

"The country," he said, "has its customs even as the town has. You follow the country usage with which I happen to be unfamiliar."

"Do but teach me where I act amiss," Henry Elizabeth entreated. "I am as hot as fire to know how to carry myself decorously, and shall take no umbrage at your lessons. Would I seem indeed very uncouth to a fair lady?"

"If the fair lady," Master Gallop replied, "were a great lady and a fine lady she would, I make no doubt, find you a little lacking in what I may call those graces of demeanour which go far to please her sweet sex. But indeed yours are

but trifling errors which a very little schooling will set right."

Therewith Master Gallop proceeded to instruct his new friend in the particulars of a gentleman's behaviour at table, as how he should occupy his seat, and with what measure of care he should eat and drink, and how he should avoid attempting the two enterprises at the same time, with many other excellent counsels and instructions to which his guest listened with a great air of attention, evidently committing them to memory as well as he could upon a first essay.

"You townfolk," he said, when his teacher had finished his preliminaries of instruction, "seem to me to be a trifle over-nice in your ways. But if such be your ways I shall do my best to conform to them, seeing that they make part of the lesson which I have travelled hither to learn. Wherefore, Master Gallop, I shall rate you as still better a friend if you will give me your advice on certain other matters."

"Speak," said the host, with a gracious wave of his hand. He was mightily pleased to find his guest so promising a pupil.

"I may tell you," said Henry Elizabeth, "that I have come to London with two purposes. The first is to get even with a man that has made a fool of me. The second—though indeed this should rightly be the first—is to gain favour with a fair lady who has also, it may be, made a fool of me, though I should be loth to set it down so."

Master Gallop nodded his head very gravely and assumed an air of great wisdom.

"Continue, my son," he urged, "expound, elucidate, particularise. What has this man done unto you, and what the woman?"

"The man," Henry Elizabeth replied, "has made me hate him because he forced me to a bout of sword-play, of which, heaven help me, I know no more than a monkey, and he, being both skilled and cunning, put me to great shame. As for the woman, I believe she has made me love her, for I know that I desire very hotly to shine in her eyes."

"Such a desire is very creditable to a man of your years," Master Gallop pronounced, "or indeed to a man of any years that has preserved his pith and vigour. I dare swear there are many pretty devices for the wooing of ladies in which I can copiously instruct you."

"You are very good," said Henry Elizabeth, "but as for the lady, I think that I should woo her and, if it please God, win her in my own way or not at all. What I am hot to know is how I may set about to acquire such a measure of sword-craft that when next I encounter my fine gentleman the odds will not be so heavy against me."

"I used to be a pretty good sworder myself in my younger days," said his new friend, "but of late between my leisures and my pleasures I fear I have grown somewhat rusty. Yet I guess that I remember enough of the thing to teach you the rudiments."

"Under your favour," Henry Elizabeth replied, "while I thank you heartily for your friendly offer, I must needs answer you that I may not avail of it. What I need, and what I seek, is the service of the best man in all London that teaches sword-play, and if you can give me that man's name I shall be heartily grateful to you."

"So I can," Gallop said heartily, "and so I will. Antonio Polidori is the very man for your money, so long as you have money enough for him: Antonio Polidori of Ruffian Hall. But his fees for teaching are heavy."

"I have a matter of money with me," said Henry Elizabeth, "and can command more in this city ere that be spent. So I doubt not that I shall be able to satisfy this foreigner you speak of. But do you assure him the best, for I will have none other."

"You are in the right," Gallop declared, "but you may take my word for it that Polidori is esteemed the finest blade in Europe, and if you will not take my word I can bring you to assurance of certain young nobles of the court that swear by him."

"Say no more," Henry Elizabeth protested, "I will even take your word for it, and will gladly go with you to this place you speak of——"

"Ruffian Hall," said the ex-jester, with a smile, "is the bye-name we Londoners give to that quarter of the town in which adventurers and roysterers of all kinds do mainly congregate. But for all its ill-sounding name, it shelters within its confines many creditable practitioners of the noble art of self-defence, and of these Antonio Polidori is easily the prince."

"Why then," said Henry Elizabeth, "I am your man for

Ruffian Hall as soon as you please. But there are other matters in which I need instruction, such as the conforming of my garments to the fashion of the town and the choosing of a proper lodging, and the way to bear myself towards the making of friends and the like. And I tell you freely that I am of a mind, when I am in better trim, to betake me to the court and shake hands with the queen."

"The queen," said Master Gallop gravely, "is always glad to greet such of her loving subjects as are like to be of any use to her. And it is not an over-hard matter to gain presentation to her majesty. But if you have any desire to make your way at court, I should be quick to ask you if you were ready to be purple or yellow."

"Purple or yellow," his hearer echoed, with a hint of anger in his voice, for he began to fancy that the old gentleman was making sport of him. The jester read his thoughts and smiled benignly.

"London," he explained, "is divided into two factions as savage as those which divided Byzantium of old. But whereas Byzantium was cloven into the factions of the green and the blue, our living London is sundered into the parties of the purple and the yellow, which is to say, into the parties of my lord of Leicester and my lord of Norfolk, whose colours these are. Any man who hopes to make his way in the world by court favour must make his choice of one or the other of these same standards."

Henry Elizabeth, who had no great taste for finery, gave a few moments of careless speculation to the question as to which of the two colours named would best suit his warm complexion and his warm hair. Finding no answer to this problem, he decided to question his admonisher.

"And which of these standards," he asked, "would you recommend to the service of a stranger?"

"Have you no inclination," Master Gallop asked, with some surprise and more curiosity, "for one side more than for another?"

The West Countryman shook his head.

Master Gallop, seeing that he was to get no better answer, went on with his comment.

"If I were a young man," he began. Then he hastily halted and correcting himself, resumed: "If I were a younger man,

and yet had my head crammed with my present knowledge of court, I should have no hesitation in throwing in my lot with the fortunes of Robert Dudley. For Robert Dudley has the knack of tickling the queen's fancy, which the other fellow has not. It is no concern of mine or yours what the relations may be between our sovereign liege and my lord of Leicester. I may have my own opinions thereupon; also I may not. I may, or I may not, recall certain stories about our maiden queen and a certain admiral whose head was too heavy for his shoulders. There may have been rompings and towings once, there may be rompings and towings now. It is wise to remember that after all it is a romping and a towing world. But if I were asked to wager as to whether her majesty would or would not marry Robert Dudley I should place my few pence on the dare that she would do no such thing. I have heard what I have heard. She is but a young woman still, as women go, but if she live to be old I will stake my life that she will remain unwedded to the end. However that is for the future, but my lord of Leicester is certainly a soaring star. For the present an apt question is, have you any friends in London?"

"There is a worthy merchant," said Henry Elizabeth, "in whose hands certain moneys are lodged to my advantage, but as yet I know of him no more than his name. But I carry a letter of recommendation from Devon to one Dr. Dee, who, I am told, is a man of some little note in your great city."

Master Gallop lifted up his arms in an exaggeration of applause.

"Of some little note!" he echoed, with a point of pretestation in his voice. "There are few men more noteworthy in London at this moment, or more high in favour with the Queen's grace than Dr. Dee, and if you can command him for a friend and patron you are indeed in luck's way."

"What can he do for me?" Henry Elizabeth asked, with a prick of that shrewdness which underlay his easy-going seeming. "Can he advise me better than you, for instance, as to a sword-master, or direct me to a feater tailor, or teach me better how to behave at table?"

"He can do none of these things," Master Gallop responded, with an emphatic shake of his head. "But he stands higher in the Queen's favour than I can count to stand, who am no



longer her familiar fool, and if he chooses, he can make your way to her presence as easy as you please."

"Well," said Henry Elizabeth thoughtfully, "I have no present use for the Queen's audience. I have no mind to go before her to beg for some favour if I have no favour to give on my own side. When I have made myself what I wish to make myself, then I shall be glad enough of some words with her majesty, which shall show her how I can serve her and how she can serve me. But I think that there is a bit of walking before I come to that turn in the lane."

Gallop surveyed the speaker with an air of good-humoured approval.

"You are a shrewd fellow," he asserted, "and have in you the makings of a proper man. Let her majesty wait upon your leisure, by all means. As she does not know what she is losing, poor woman, she will be the less likely to grieve. But if I were you I should deliver my letter to Dr. Dee as speedily as may be, for if, as they say, he can read into the future, he can give you better counsel than I. And when you have done that business come back to me and I will convoy you to Ruffian Hall."

Henry Elizabeth agreed. He felt that his entertainer was in some measure laughing at him, but he was less offended at the thought than he would have been a fortnight earlier. He had learned some lessons on his road to London, and the best of these lessons was that he was not necessarily the king of the pins. It was a most unpalatable lesson, but it was perhaps the necessary comment on that lesson in sword-play in the front of Braginton forge. He leaned forward upon the table and smiled at his companion.

"You are a good kind of man," he admitted, "and I shall not break your face for making game of me as I should have done a few days ago. You have entertained me well, you have taught me some wholesome truths, and for all these benefits I owe you as many friendly turns which I shall make good to you when the clock strikes my hour. And now I think it were well that I should return to my hostel and set about the delivery of my letter to Dr. Dee."

Master Gallop, having nothing better to do, proposed to accompany his guest to his inn, a proposal which was accepted cheerfully. So the pair set out together into the humming London streets, pleasantly involved in affable discourse.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A VISIT TO MORTLAKE

**W**HEN Henry Elizabeth with his friend reached the Libbard he was faced on the threshold by the landlord, who greeted him with shrill ejaculations of surprise and gratification. It seemed that mine host had given up his guest for lost, had believed him robbed, trepanned, kidnapped, murdered, heaven knows what. And all because he had not returned to sleep under the shelter of his roof. Henry Elizabeth, hastening to his chamber with Master Gallop at his heels, found that the landlord's interest in his welfare had extended so far as to make some attempts upon the integrity of the fastenings of his portmanteau, which had however successfully resisted those minor efforts which, halting short of actual violence, were all that the landlord had in his discretion permitted himself.

Henry Elizabeth opened his valise, sought and found the letter to Dr. Dee, and decided that there was no time like the present for a walk to Mortlake. Master Gallop in the enthusiasm of his new friendship volunteered to show him part of the way, and did indeed pilot him very companionably beyond Westminster, where he took leave of him after insisting on presenting him with the handsome staff he carried as an aid to his travel, and giving him many and careful directions as to the course he should pursue along the river.

Henry Elizabeth footed it cheerfully along the river's bank. The jolly Thames talked to him as he went. He was fain to admit that there were no such rivers in his own West Country, and he was prepared in his zeal as an Englishman to assert that there were no such rivers in the world. He was going hot-foot to visit a magician. He cherished an honest belief in magic, but if a necromancer had stood on the towing-path that day and told him that he should gaze one day upon rivers

to which the Thames should seem little better than a pitiful rivulet, he would, being no stickler for punctiliousness in behaviour, have laughed in the soothsayer's face.

Cheerfully he travelled all along that pleasant river way. The air seemed tame and flat to him after the clean currents of his own dear Devon, but there was withal a certain brisk winsomeness about the landscape and about the flowing flood and the gaiety of spring which compelled him, for all his sturdy provincialism, to admit, albeit only to himself, that there might be a kind word to say for those whose lot it was to be born outside the confines of that heaven upon earth which was named the West Country.

When he was—though he did not know it then—within about a mile of Mortlake, he encountered a cloud of dust, the day being dry and for the season almost sultry, and behind the cloud came a gentleman cantering on horseback. By the flushing of his face and the twitching of his lips, he appeared to be a very angry gentleman, and it would seem as if his anger made him something reckless in his riding, for he charged down upon the pedestrian as if he had been heading an assault, and if Henry Elizabeth had not stepped nimbly to one side it would have been a question whether horseman or footman would have tasted a fall. But even while he skipped briskly to the left of the roadway he stretched out an alert hand and catching hold of the heedless horseman's bridle brought him to so sudden a halt as nearly tossed him from his saddle. The rider glared down upon his delayer with a clenched and lifted fist, and the delayer looked up at the rider. He beheld a foolish florid face poised on a full-habited body. The rider beheld the bulk of the man that stayed his course and seemed to change his temper, for the lifted arm with the clenched fist dropped in a langour to the rider's side and the florid foolish face that was crumpled with anger smoothed into a kind of serenity.

"You should be more careful when you ride the highway," Henry Elizabeth said reprovingly, "lest you hurt better men than yourself."

"I did not see you," said the gentleman; "I crave your pardon. But these be times in England which a sensible man is hard put to it to endure."

Henry Elizabeth looked at the man in no little amazement,

for it had not occurred to him that much was amiss with the country.

"Why, what is wrong?" he asked with an honest desire for information.

"Semiramis," the man shouted, and then again "Semiramis," and yet a third time, "Semiramis."

Henry Elizabeth was so staggered by this cryptic reply, which held for him no meaning whatsoever, that his fingers relaxed their hold upon the horse's bridle. The cavalier perceiving this gave his steed a sharp cut over the flanks with his riding whip which set the sweating beast off in a gallop. Henry Elizabeth looked after the fugitive with a puzzled countenance.

"Now what in the devil's name," he asked himself aloud, "did he mean by that gibberish?"

Finding no satisfactory answer to his question, he dismissed the matter from his mind and continued his journey to Mortlake at a quickened pace which brought him there within quarter of an hour.

As he entered Mortlake village he was not a little surprised by the emptiness of the place. There were no people in the streets save an ancient gaffer who was plodding painfully along, and whose venerable mien took the traveller's fancy. He clapped him gently on the shoulder and enquired the way to the house of Dr. Dee.

The old man turned on him the gaze of a pair of mild blue eyes that had grown old in looking intently upon nothing of importance and that now seemed quickened into a pathetic liveliness by some vague sense of the unexpected. He blinked tremulously at his questioner as a man might blink who had just witnessed the end of the world and found himself surviving it.

"You seek Dr. Dee," he said in an ancient quavering voice which seemed suddenly to challenge the stranger in the thick of all his lustihood with the assurance that he too should grow old, "then you be one of the Queen's men. But you come late, lad, you come late."

"I would have you to know, gaffer," said Henry Elizabeth, "that I am never too late for anything."

The aged man eyed him admiringly, and his aged voice wavered more than ever when he spoke again.

"It is all very well for you, fair sir, who are young and gamesome to talk so bravely. If you were old and feeble like me you might understand why I complain of being left at the tail end of entertainments."

"Heaven have mercy," cried Henry Elizabeth; "what is it that you complain of?"

"Do you think," asked the old man querulously, "that I have not as lively a wish as the others to look on the face of the Queen? But my limbs are no longer nimble, my blood is no longer hot, wherefore I lag behind and lose sport."

"The Queen," cried Henry Elizabeth in astonishment, "do you mean to say that the Queen is somewhere at hand?"

"Have I not been telling you this half-hour," said the old man fretfully, "that the Queen, God bless her, is hereabout a-visiting of Dr. Dee, and that I shall miss the seeing of her because of my infirmities?"

He slipped into a dreary fit of coughing which promised to be interminable, but which came to a halt quite suddenly and abruptly with a sharpness as of a sprung trap, and left Henry Elizabeth gaping. Instantly the old man began again in the same tone of plaintive protestation

"It is not every day," he complained, "that her gracious majesty, God bless her, comes to Mortlake. She has been before and will come again, please God, but none the less it is a rare thing and one to give praise for and I am sick and sorry to be a-missing of her."

Henry Elizabeth stared at the old man with a quickened interest.

"Do you tell me," he questioned, "that the Queen is at this moment in your village and visiting of Dr. Dee?"

The old man nodded with tremulous eagerness.

"Surely she is doing that same," he answered, "and I fear she will make an end of her visit or ever I can hustle my old bones to the spot."

"Ancient friend," cried Henry Elizabeth impulsively, "do you know the way to the house of Dr. Dee?"

"Surely I do," croaked the oldster. "Is there man, woman, or child, cock, hen, or chicken, in Mortlake that does not know the way to his gates?"

"Then," said Henry Elizabeth cheerfully, "you shall be my

guide to Dr. Dee, and I will take it upon me that you shall see the Queen. Now then, gaffer, up you go."

As Henry Elizabeth spoke he caught hold of the elder about the middle—but he handled him as tenderly as he were an infant—and swung him with effortless ease from the ground on which he hobbled to his own broad right shoulder. The old man gave a little squawk of surprise at first, but when he found himself so comfortably in saddle he made no more protest.

"Now," said Henry Elizabeth, "tell me how to go, gaffer, and have no fear that I shall drop you by the way."

As he spoke he set off at a brisk trot carrying the old man, of whose weight he was scarcely conscious. The ancient, in an ecstasy of delight, chuckled forth from his perch a tremulous guidance.

Following the directions of the old man and pushing on at a lively pace, Henry Elizabeth soon found himself in the thick of a little crowd that were clustered about the garden gate of a dwelling of comfortable proportions and pleasing appearance that lay on the further side of the village. Henry Elizabeth had arrived late for whatever might be going on, but the fact troubled him little. If he arrived on the latter fringe of the huddle of spectators it took him but a few seconds of work with his brawny bulk and his busy elbows to edge himself into the front rank of the crowd.

He may have gained some objurgations on the way, but these died into silence as their utterers took note of the massive form and determined carriage of the youth who pushed his way ahead to their disadvantage and displeasure. Henry Elizabeth, tranquilly indifferent to, because unaware of, their resentment, came calmly to a halt in the van of a considerable mob of people who were being kept in some measure of control and order by a company of pikemen in brightly-coloured liveries that were gay with silver badges. A handsomely-caparisoned jennet stood on one side, and about it a number of dismounted gentlemen that held their horses.

Even as the young man came to a halt he heard his burden twittering in his ear.

"Blessing on your head," he was saying, "we come but in the nick of time, for I take it that the Queen is just a-coming

forth. Mark how the doors begin to creak and the stirring among the soldier men."

Indeed Henry Elizabeth could observe that it was even as the old man said. The men-at-arms seemed to stiffen, urging the fluent crowd about them into a solidity of respect. But Henry Elizabeth kept where he was well at the head of the gathering, with his passenger hoisted aloft, and paid no heed to the manœuvres of the guard. He saw that the doors of the mansion began to part and watched the widening eagerly.

When the doors were fairly open Henry Elizabeth beheld a gentleman wearing a flowing gown of black and a black scull-cap, who was ushering a woman to the threshold with a happy blend of dignity and reverence. It did not need the kicks and whispers of his cargo to assure him that he beheld the person of the Queen. As a West Countryman Henry Elizabeth had a native instinct for loyalty, wherefore he plucked off his cap and waved it as merrily as the rest, but it was curiosity even more than loyalty that rivetted his regard upon his sovereign.

He beheld a woman of some five-and-thirty years with a pale face and a flame of red hair and the strangest eyes in all the world. Henry Elizabeth, not being a courtier, would never of his own taste have found her handsome or desirable. The face was too hard, the mouth too tight, the eyes too cruel, to trouble his pulses. But the strength that was in him greeted the strength that was in her, and his first thought was, in that first glimpse of her, that it was a pity that she had not been born a man.

The Queen surveyed the little gathering in front of Dr. Dee's dwelling with a curious expression on her face, which was partly that of a captain about to harangue his men on the edge of battle and partly that of a mother cossetting her brood. As the components of the crowd cheered lustily a wave of proud colour flooded the Queen's cheeks, for Elizabeth dearly loved applause and adulation whether it slipped from the trim lips of the courtier or volleyed from the round mouth of the clown. Yet if she eyed her applauders kindly, there was also a quality of defiance in her regard which seemed to say that while she welcomed the enthusiasm of her good people, there must be no question but that the enthusiasm was

so much incense offered to an unquestioned mistress. "I am King of England," her glance seemed to challenge, "in being Queen of England, and if I will my good people well I wish them to take that same good will as little less authoritative than Holy Writ." Such at least was the confused impression conveyed to the mind of the West Countryman as he stood there with the gaffer on his shoulder and stared at the first lady in Christendom.

"Here," he said to himself in the unconscious speech of swift thought, "is a woman that could make a fool of a man as easy as kiss-my-hand." Henry Elizabeth did not say or rather did not think "kiss-my-hand," but the intention was the same if the metaphor were more racy. "She is a comely woman, but I have hugged many less comely that were tenfold more lovable. I should fear to cross her if I were a woman; I should avoid to cross her if I were a cautious man. Being myself I should not choose to cross her, but if it came to quarrelling it should make a pretty brawl between us. Oh, my dear," he whispered in the privacy of his mind, "you are as sturdy a devil as ever wore petticoats, and I would not be your lover for a thousand pounds weight in gold, but I will say this much in your favour that you have an eye for a proper man."

Now he whispered this for a reason. For if Henry Elizabeth saw the Queen, very surely the Queen saw Henry Elizabeth. Indeed, he made a conspicuous figure in the front of the crowd with the funny old man hunched upon his shoulder. The old man was waving his arms and nodding his head in an ecstasy of delight while he piped in a faded voice what he meant for vociferation of cheers. But Henry Elizabeth stood doggedly on his legs, bearing his burden as lightly as if it had been a pillow, and his eyes were fixed on the Queen in a frank steadfastness of wonder. The Queen looked back at him and laughed. Then she turned to Dr. Dee, who surveyed the scene with the composure of one who has learned the values of life, and spoke.

"God's thunder," she cried, "who is this fellow? Is it Guy of Warwick by any chance, for I think he is too young to be Gog or Magog whom I remember in the Tower."

Henry Elizabeth could not hear what she said, but he knew that she was speaking about him and that all eyes were turned



in his direction while Dr. Dee with explanatory apologetic gestures was evidently confessing his ignorance.

Henry Elizabeth felt that it behooved him to do somewhat, so, after a moment's hesitation, he gripped his old man by the middle and lifting him from his shoulder made his incline in the direction of her majesty.

"God save the Queen," bellowed Henry Elizabeth, and "God save the Queen" cheered the old fellow as he was brandished in the air. At the sound of those two voices so differing in volume the crowd caught fire anew and flamed into cheers whose swelling thunder seemed to afford her majesty a good deal of gratification. She said something to her host to which he bowed reverentially in reply, and then without more ado she waved her hand imperiously for her horse to be brought forward. Two gentlemen helped to place her in a saddle which reminded Henry Elizabeth somewhat in size and shape of his favourite chair at home, albeit the saddle was richly upholstered and gaily decked and was altogether a very sumptuous piece of furniture. The Queen settled herself at her leisure, gave the signal to start, and the cavalcade began to move slowly off with the pikemen closing about it. The crowd cheered again, Henry Elizabeth the loudest and his old man the shrillest in the chorus of applause. Dr. Dee stood bowing on his doorstep. The gentlemen attendants urged their horses to a trot. In a few minutes nothing was left of expectation, ceremonial, enthusiasm, but a trampled space in front of Dr. Dee's dwelling and a large young man who gingerly picked a small old man from his shoulder.

## CHAPTER XV.

DR. DEE

**D**R. DEE, standing on his threshold, beckoned to Henry Elizabeth, who nodded compliance with his call. But before he obeyed it he scooped in his pocket for a shilling and gave it to the gaffer whose fingers were not too stiff to close upon it eagerly.

"Well, old friend," said the giver, "we have seen the Queen together, you and I. I for the first time, you it may be for the last. There's no gainsaying that she is a fine figure of a woman and a worthy to serve."

"Aye, aye," chirped the oldster, "you say well, young gentleman. I served King Harry in my day, and I wish with all my heart that I could serve Queen Bess."

He ducked a salute to his patron and, turning on his heel, hobbled away while Henry Elizabeth advanced with long leisurely strides towards the steps of the dwelling on the highest of which Dr. Dee appeared to await him. As soon as he got within earshot the great man greeted him.

"Young master giant," he said, "whoever you may be, whether Grandgousier or Gargantua or Pantagruel, let me tell you that you have taken the fancy of her majesty, and that she has desired me to learn your name and history."

"I am glad," said Henry Elizabeth, speaking as he scaled the steps, "to have attracted her majesty's notice if only for a moment. But as my business here is with yourself, I can at your convenience discover you such particulars of my existence as it may please you to garner."

Dr. Dee listened with an evident surprise to the rough and tumble frankness of this speech. He fixed a shrewd glance upon his visitor.

"Why do you come to see me?" he asked. "You should know, if you do not know, that I never receive casual visitors."

Those that care to consult me must do so by appointment and under recommendation."

"I come under recommendation," Henry Elizabeth answered briskly, "and I am led to believe that the recommendation is sufficient."

As he spoke he pulled from the bosom of his jerkin the letter which his friend of Tor Bay had given to him, and with his best attempt at a bow he presented the letter to Dr. Dee. The philosopher took the paper, broke the seal and read rapidly its contents. Then he turned to the bearer with a kindlier smile upon his curiously lined countenance.

"You must not be surprised," he said, "if I have to exercise no little care with certain of those who come here to drink at my fountain of wisdom. Would you believe it, there was a gentleman but a little while ago who rode here to ask my advice upon some matter in which he was engaged, and who went off in a huff because on account of the coming of her gracious majesty I was unable to receive him?"

"Was he a florid fellow?" Henry Elizabeth asked, and gave a brief description of his encounter of a little while before. The doctor nodded his head.

"That is the very fellow. Master Andrew Lillingworth, of Highgate. A fool who thinks himself a wise man. He is a little too much interested in Spain and the Spaniards to take my fancy."

"When I asked him what ailed him," Henry Elizabeth observed, "he answered me with something like Serimaris or Sinamaris. At least that is all I remember of it, though he said it three times."

The doctor frowned.

"It was Semiramis he said, no doubt. That is a name those malcontents give to her gracious majesty. Semiramis was an old-time queen of Assyria of an affectionate disposition."

As the subject did not greatly interest Henry Elizabeth, he looked suggestively at the letter which the learned man held in his hand. The doctor followed the glance and the thought.

"You come to me very well recommended, young gentleman," he declared. "There is no one in all England whom I hold in higher esteem than the writer of this letter, and because he entreats me to be your friend—if for no other reason

than may be suggested by your person and carriage—let me assure you of my friendship.”

Henry Elizabeth was for uttering some incoherent phrases of gratitude, but the philosopher daffed them lightly aside with a wave of his fine white hand.

“Come inside, young sir,” he requested, in a voice that seemed more familiar with command than with petition. “We shall make acquaintance better within than out here in the open, with half Mortlake gaping at us.

The sage’s description was somewhat exaggerated, as at that moment only a few small children remained of all the crowd that had gathered to watch the coming and going of the great Queen. But it seemed to Henry Elizabeth that Dr. Dee was not unwilling to have it understood that his motions were always observed by a multitude. He cheerfully expressed his readiness to enter the house, and blithely followed Dr. Dee across the threshold.

As he pursued his host’s footsteps he looked about him, according to his new habit, and noted that he moved among the commodities of a house that bore a marked resemblance to the dwelling of Master Pancras. There was the same richness of ornament, the same eccentricity in richness, the same opulent suggestion that the rotund world had been put under levy to feed the caprice of the owner. But none of these things deeply impressed a youth whose ideas of wealth were limited to his own ideas of comfort and who regarded gildings and hangings and the like not so much with disdain as with indifference. So without being aware of it he trod the rich furs and velvets of Dr. Dee’s abode with the manner of the cynic who trampled upon the pride of Plato, albeit without that brag of greater pride with which Plato gently reproached the cynic.

Dr. Dee conducted his visitor into an inner chamber which was hung with trappings of black velvet curiously embroidered in silver with all manner of singular devices. On the ceiling were displayed all the heavenly bodies in their plenitude, and round about the walls were hangings woven with the images of those gods and goddesses chosen by astrologers to represent the properties supposed to be innate in the various stars and planets. There was an altar at one end of the room upon which a fire of wood was burning that emitted a pale

greenish flame with a volume of strangely scented smoke. On a table in front of this altar stood a skull and an hour glass and a curiously shaped black stone that seemed in spite of its solidity and its thick colour to suggest transparency. The room, which admitted no daylight, was illuminated by a huge swinging lamp which gave forth a pale green light akin to that which flourished in the altar flame. The whole effect of the room was well calculated to impress the unsophisticated mind. Henry Elizabeth certainly was unsophisticated, and he certainly was impressed, but not altogether in the sense intended. He found the room close, the air foul, and he longed to stand in the open again.

The philosopher seated himself and motioned to Henry Elizabeth to do the like. When he had done so Dr. Dee, holding the letter he had just read in his right hand, and striking it softly against the open palm of his left, spoke in a low clear voice.

"My old friend," he began, "tells me that you have travelled to London with a certain purpose in your mind in which he seems to think that I may be, as I shall be glad to be, of service to you. But he does not tell me what that purpose is."

"He does not tell you," said Henry Elizabeth bluntly, "for the very good reason that he did not know."

"Then perhaps," said Dr. Dee amiably, "you will be good enough to supply me with the knowledge which he lacks in order that I may the better be of help to him and to you."

His hearer was busy with his thoughts. He could not tell this learned gentleman, this friend of queens, that he travelled to London on the trail of a petticoat. After a pause he answered slowly.

"I come to London in the hope to make my fortune and to mend my manners. I am country bred and I am told by those who know better that I need to be licked into shape. Also I should be glad, if it might be, to serve the Queen."

Dr. Dee, extending his right hand, clasped that of Henry Elizabeth in his own and then fixed his gaze upon the black stone. For several minutes which seemed as many ages to youthful impatience, he sat thus clasping and staring steadfastly. Then all of a sudden, when Henry Elizabeth was fit to split his skull with the restrained desire for yawning, the august head of Dr. Dee began to sway slightly backwards and

forwards. After he had thus waggled his head a good many times he turned from his contemplation of the black stone and fixed a keen gaze upon his visitor.

"I read in yonder talisman," he said, "that you are destined to travel far along the pathway of life, that you are destined to strange adventures, that you will have felicities and infelicities, but that your good fortune shall far overtop your ill. In a word, young gentleman," continued the doctor, "I may very well tell you that I look upon you as an uncommonly lucky young fellow."

Henry Elizabeth found the prognostication comforting if not astonishingly convincing, and he hastened to express his gratitude to the famous man. Dr. Dee listened to his words with a kindly smile and waited gracefully until he had made an end of speech. Then he spoke.

"We," he said, "who read in the future do so, it may be, at the peril of our souls. We are, when all is said and done, like sailors upon uncharted seas, who go by guess-work, who work by rule of thumb, and who yet have behind them the assurance that they do not speak in vain. If I were in your place I should be resolute to act upon my counsel. But because this is an age of sceptics, it may very well be that you will doubt and disbelieve and deny, in the which case I for my own poor part will be heartily sorry for you. For indeed I discern in the darkness a smiling and kindly future. Yet you must credit it yourself if you wish it to come to fruition."

Now there was nothing in the world that Henry Elizabeth trusted in so much as the certainty of his own good fortune. So he nodded his head approvingly at Dr. Dee.

"I have always believed in myself," he affirmed simply, "and as I hope, I shall always believe in myself. If a man does not believe in himself, being the one sure thing of which he has any knowledge, what the devil shall he believe in?"

Dr. Dee smiled at the vehemence and simplicity of his visitor.

"A man would indeed be a foolish fellow," he said, "who felt any doubt as to his own existence, however difficult it might be to prove logically. I rather meant in what I said that you should have confidence in yourself and in your own power to succeed."

"If that is what you want," said Henry Elizabeth cheer-

fully, "you have happened upon the right man. If I am very certain as to what I desire to attain in this world, I am also very confident of my power to attain it."

The learned man looked at the speaker with a mixed smile in which a wistful pity and a tender irony were blended.

"You should go far, Master Braginton," he murmured, "you should go far. To know what you want is much in life. To be sure of getting it is more." Here his voice dropped of a sudden to a confidential whisper as he enquired, "and what pray do you happen to want?"

"I want a good deal," said Henry Elizabeth bluntly. "I want to become acquainted with the Queen who is my namesake and to be of such use to her that she will be glad to be of use to me. And I want to know somewhat of a man who is my enemy."

"Here," said the sage with a seraphic smile, "are demands upon the favour of fate which it should not be difficult for that wild divinity to gratify. As to an interview with her majesty, I can compass so much for you without abusing my standing in her favour, but how far that interview may develop into acquaintance depends upon yourself and the power you have of convincing Elizabeth that you are not only willing to be of service to her (which is, as I hope, the wish of every Englishman, and of little importance) but capable of being of service to her, which is indeed a vastly different matter." After a short pause the doctor continued: "Young sir, you have told me that you would be glad of such poor assistance as it is in my power to proffer with regard to some enemy of yours. Who is this enemy?"

"That is what I wish to learn," Henry Elizabeth answered, "for I know very little about him. There came certain gentlefolk to the smithy at Braginton a few days ago, with whom I had a quarrel. He that seemed their leader, he that I call my enemy, titled himself Sir Guy Warwick, and those that were with him were, as I remember, Sir Havelock Dane, Sir Pepin Little, Sir William Orange, and Sir Charles Martel."

Dr. Dee shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Those names are no names of living men," he asserted. "They are the names of knights and paladins from the tales of Charlemagne and the like, and must have been assumed for some purpose of cheat or cover."

Henry Elizabeth was instantly in a furious rage to think that he had thus been further deceived and fooled by the insolent gentleman. While he fumed Dr. Dee, who, knitting his bushy eyebrows, appeared to be reflecting, suddenly addressed him.

"Young man," he said, "I am not one of those who promise much and perform little, choosing rather not to promise at all than not to perform. It is not on all days, it is not at all hours, that I can read clearly in the magic mirror. When all is said and done, I am no more than a mortal with a little knowledge to guide and a little experience to aid him. But in my time I have seen many men, and I have never seen a face that I have forgotten nor the label belonging thereto. Further, I am familiar with the faces of many men that I have never seen, so that I should be able to greet them by their name were they to enter the room at this moment. Can you by chance prick me a clear blason in words of the seeming of these wanderers from a book of old romance?"

Henry Elizabeth nodded emphatically. On the credit side of his character the merit of a good memory was written in a large hand. He housed a shrewd mind under his thatch, and the custom of his country life had made him an apt observer. Now his memory was seasoned by that sharpest and savagest of all condiments, hatred, and he was sure that he would know his enemy again if the bones of half a century lay between their next meeting.

"Aye," he replied, "I can tell you what manner of man the leader was. He was not so tall as I by half a head or more and far sparer of body but mighty quick and nimble, and as for his age I should hazard him five or six and thirty. His face was of a long oval with a clear dark skin that had a kind of smoothness like a wax visage as if he had kept it free from wrinkles by never suffering it to show his mind. He showed a long thin mouth, with lips of a brisk red. His nose was long and large but finely fashioned. His eyes were of a hot and sullen russet and their glances were fierce and insolent such as might easily frighten any woman or beast that they menaced, or many kinds of men. His cheek-bones were high and his ears were large but they lay flat to his head. His hair and beard had the brownness of a newly-turned field. He showed his teeth when he sneered, and they seemed white



and sound. Above his left eyebrow there ran the seam of an old scar about an inch long. I think I can say no more save that some might call it a comely countenance, but to me it seemed very hateful."

"You are a rare bird in the quire of youth," Dr. Dee approved, "for you know how to look about you. It is not every lad of your standing that could give me so plain an image of his enemy."

Henry Elizabeth was gratified, but he was hotter to be instructed than complimented.

"Do you know the man," he asked eagerly. Dr. Dee raised a reproving hand to temper his eagerness.

"Gently, my young friend," he commanded, "gently. You have limned me a lively picture, and I think I can pick out the original. But you say this man was in company. What were his fellows like?"

"There were four other men that rode with him," Henry Elizabeth answered. "I did not pay them the heed that I gave to their leader, for so he seemed to be, but yet I think I could make a fair shot at their markings, if to do so would serve your honourability."

"Do so, I pray you," the doctor answered. "You may oft times trace a man by the company he keeps."

"I did not con them so closely," Henry Elizabeth replied, "for I had less of a cause to mark them. You note the vixen more sharply than the cubs when you fall upon a nest of foxes. But one was a flat-bodied fellow like a board, with hair of a dull favour and cheeks as yellow as a lemon. I take it that he had suffered from the jaundice one time or another. He was dressed in a murray-coloured habit——"

"You need not speak of their garments," the sage interrupted gently. "A man may change his garments frequently, but he can seldom alter his lineaments, and it is by these that I would seek to trace these people."

Henry Elizabeth, colouring warmly at the rebuke, continued his tale.

"Another was a burly fellow with chubby cheeks like a cherub on a headstone, and skin as pink as a poppy. He carried himself like a jolly companion, but I would not trust his jollity a yard beyond the toe of my boot. The third and fourth were so much of a muchness that now, in looking back

on the matter, I take them to be brothers. They were both small and dark and spare with hair and eyes of a smooth blackness, and I should guess them to be pale-faced by nature, though they were burnt to a crisp by the sun, and they rode their horses loosely."

Dr. Dee clapped his white hands together with a look of strong approval.

"See now," he said, "how excellent and commendable a thing is a good memory. I believe that I shall be able to serve you in this business and that without resort to black magic or white. For the wise man works best through his wisdom."

The pulses of Henry Elizabeth throbbed within his body, and he leaned forward eagerly.

"You can tell me who these gentry be?" he exulted. Dr. Dee answered complacently.

"You may often arrive at an unknown quantity by knowledge of its component parts. When I find such a fellowship as you have portrayed, it should be no difficult problem to guess at their leader. He that you first mentioned with the yellow visage is Nicholas Gardwood, who hath been in his time a pirate on the Guinea coast. The ruddy fellow is one Toby Jackaway, who has sold his sword to the best paymaster a dozen times in the foreign wars. The pair that you took to be brothers are so indeed, and their names are John Inch and Hugh Inch."

Henry Elizabeth stared at the astrologer in amazement. He was too ready to accept the statement of the seer to question its unsupported veracity. And two of the names, if not their owners, were familiar to him, Gardwood of Brixham and Jackaway of Exeter. But these names did not include the name he longed to know.

"But the leader," he cried, "the captain of these men. What is the name of my enemy?"

"When I told you but now," said the astrologer, "that you might deduce a man from the company he keeps, I spoke truly enough, and yet I misled you, for I knew his name from the first and only sought the rest in confirmation."

"His name," cried Henry Elizabeth passionately, "give me his name that I may say it to myself like a trained jackdaw till I have need to say it no more."

"His name," said the doctor, "is Sir Matthew Favill, and he is the Queen's bitter enemy. The man who would put him out of her path would do her a good turn."

He rose as he spoke, and moved slowly towards the great oaken cupboard that filled the wall at the far end of the room. When he threw back its doors Henry Elizabeth saw that its space was divided into a great number of drawers with brass handles, and that each of these drawers was lettered either with a letter of the alphabet or with combinations of letters. Certain of the drawers had painted on them the names of countries, such as France, Spain, Holland, Flanders and the like. Dr. Dee opened one of these drawers, and after rummaging a little among the papers which it contained, withdrew one of their number and returning to Henry Elizabeth extended it to him.

The young man taking the paper from the doctor's hand gave a cry of surprise. For upon the paper a face was sketched with no little skill in coloured chalks, and the face was the face of the man that Henry Elizabeth hated, the face of the man that had mocked him at the forge.

"That," said Dr. Dee quietly, "is Sir Matthew Favill. Is he not the man you seek?"

"That is indeed he," Henry Elizabeth answered in a voice in which wonder was blended with something that closely resembled fear. In truth he was staggered out of his sturdy self-reliance by the wizard's prompt and seemingly miraculous solution of the problem presented to him. Dr. Dee easily interpreted the young man's agitation.

"If Sir Matthew Favill is your enemy," he said, "I must need congratulate you in choosing one who is as formidable as a crowned head, who indeed is more formidable than many a crowned head. He is an adventurer of a very rare and special temper. Also he is master of Lundy Island. Does his name mean anything to you?"

"Nothing," Henry Elizabeth replied, "save that it is the name that I longed to gain."

"Sir Matthew Favill," said the astrologer, "is by birth an Englishman, and the last of a once honourable house that has gradually declined for several generations. I hope that you have abundance of courage, young man."

"I am West Country," Henry Elizabeth answered simply,

and held it unnecessary to say more. The wise man smiled again.

"Which is as much as if a Frenchman were to reply, 'I am a Gascon,'" he commented. "You will need all your courage if you hope to enact St. George to Sir Matthew's Dragon. His life has been passed abroad at the courts of France, of Italy, of Spain. He is French, Italian, Spanish, anything rather than English. But if his being is impregnated with all the poisonous qualities that he could suck from foreign sources, he blends therein that English quality of resolution and determination which more happily employed made and will yet make Englishmen the finest fighting men in the world. He has served many causes and served them well because such service has been to his own gain and advancement. If he is in England at this hour I will make bold to prophesy that he is employed upon some desperate enterprise which calls for his daring mind and doing hand. The choice of his companions is insignificant."

Dr. Dee lapsed into a thoughtful silence which Henry Elizabeth ventured to break with a question.

"You said this man was the master of Lundy?"

"I said so and said rightly," the astrologer replied. "Though all the West Country believes that the island is owned by a foreigner, he is but a puppet who holds the place for its real ruler, Sir Matthew Favill. The secret is easily kept, for those that visit Lundy uninvited never return thence. The island is like the lion's den, the way to which was marked by many footprints, but not the road to return."

"Why should he do this thing?" Henry Elizabeth questioned. Dr. Dee shrugged his shoulders.

"That I cannot tell you. That in all probability nobody can tell save only Matthew Favill himself. I say again that if it should prove your privilege to ease the world of Matthew Favill, you will do Queen and country a simple service. But as I am your friend I should advise you in all honesty to leave Matthew Favill alone."

"I have been so advised before," said Henry Elizabeth, "and it has not changed my purpose."

Dr. Dee darted a keen and slightly suspicious glance at his young visitor.

"How mean you," he asked sharply, "since you have told me that you did not know his name."

"I told you the truth, honoured sir," Henry Elizabeth said in some confusion, "but there was another in this man's company whom I chanced to meet thereafter and have some speech with, and this other gave me even such counsel as yourself has given."

"Another," said the sage sternly. "You only spoke to me of four men."

"This other was not a man," Henry Elizabeth explained hesitatingly. "There was a woman in his company whom I chanced to meet at Exeter and whom I made bold to address. She would tell me nothing of herself, nothing of the man with whom she travelled, but she urged me as strongly as you have urged me to beware of him."

The astrologer's severe countenance was lightened by a kindly smile.

"So," he said, "we are getting the key to the mystery. This is why young Amadis from Devon wishes to pit himself against the ogre Favill. May I take it, young sire, that the woman in question was neither stricken in years nor displeasing to behold."

"She is young," Henry Elizabeth answered, doggedly striving to command a coolness in his speech and on his cheeks, "and she is the fairest creature that I have ever beheld. If you can tell me her name I shall be for ever beholden to you."

"Nay," said the astrologer, "I can tell you no more than I know. Many women must have served Sir Matthew, as assuredly he never served any woman. If there be a woman in his company she is so for some good reason of his own as he accounts good reason. But I fear I must leave you to discover the woman's name for yourself."

On hearing this Henry Elizabeth looked so woefully disappointed that Dr. Dee spoke again.

"I grieve that I cannot gratify your wish," he said kindly, "but what you take to be my magic does not extend so far. Indeed, what I have told you was a simple matter enough if you did but know it, and need no black art or magic mirror to compass. Let me tell you the means by which I was able to find you the name of your enemy."

Seeing eager assent on his visitor's face, the astrologer continued:

"You must know that from the moment when, in my early manhood, I devoted myself to the study of the known and the unknown, I resolved to make a knowledge of my fellow men a special aim. As I travelled much in my youth I seized every opportunity of making acquaintance in each country that I visited with such men as might reasonably be expected to play a part in the making of history. When the time came for me to make an end of voyaging and settle down to the service of philosophy I was unwilling to relinquish those advantages which I believed to be gained by familiarity with the physiognomies of men famous or infamous in the great countries of Europe. To this end I had established many friendships in the principal cities of each state, and these friends have always supplied me with the characters and descriptions of statesmen, soldiers, conspirators, divines, philosophers, criminals and the like as they might think likely to interest or instruct me. Furthermore, my friends were told whenever possible to procure me a delineation of the features of those persons upon whom they reported, and so faithfully did they befriend me in this particular that I possess many hundreds of such likenesses."

He paused for a moment as if he had done with speech, and it seemed to the listener that the speaker was surely the most wonderful man in the wide world, and one that had no need of magical arts to enhance his value. Doubtless Dr. Dee read some of the admiration in the face of his visitor, for he soon found his voice again.

"As for the woman whom you wish to win and whose name you do not know, if I can do no more for you, at least I can tell you her first name. It is surely Helen, it always has been Helen, and it always will be Helen, just because the ancient world went to war over a girl of that name who happened to be surpassingly beautiful. Each of us, my young friend, encounters in his youth an incarnation of that divine Helen who set Troy on fire, and each of us is ready—in his youth—to set the world on fire anew for her sake. Because I am no longer a boy, and because my taste in women has grown more general and less particular, I might be tempted to advise you to shake yourself free of such flummery. But because I can

discern that you have a generous soul in a body of most sanguineous humour, it may hap that your advantage may be best served by a faithful determination to make the most of this fancy of yours."

"She is my lady," Henry Elizabeth answered steadily, "and shall be so long as I breathe air. For the which reason I meant to become a master of sword-play, for it is with the sword I desire to prove myself."

Dr. Dee smiled approval.

"Let me tell you, my young friend," he said, "that I have the power if I choose to exert it and you choose to accept it, to make the accomplishment of this desire of yours as easy as the whisking of a milk-pudding. I have a force within me which I can transfer to you by no other method than the holding of your hands and the looking into your eyes. By this infusion of my aetherial spirit into your physical being I can so stiffen you, inspirit you, and tickle you, that you shall be able to accomplish whatever mechanical art you may be pleased to undertake, and that in so short a time that it shall seem to the vain no less than a miracle."

Henry Elizabeth entertained no doubt of the truth of the doctor's saying, and for a moment he was tempted to accept the marvellous aid thus tendered him. Only for a moment, however. Then his sturdy self asserted its command.

"I thank you kindly," he declared, "and from the very gold of my heart, but in this business of mine I must run my own errand or run it not at all. If with your honour's aid and the glamour of your honour's magic I should gain my end, it would truly be your honour that won the game and not Henry Elizabeth Braginton. And it is Henry Elizabeth Braginton that means to win the game."

Dr. Dee's fixed visage relaxed a little, and he emitted a sigh of relief so slight that it did not reach his visitor's ears. Perhaps he was glad that he had gauged his visitor so sagely.

"Well, well," he said gaily, "youth will be wise sometimes and know its own business better than us elders. Remember this, my friend, that he who says 'I shall succeed' is nearer to success than he who says 'I hope I may succeed.' A man's success lies in his intensity"—he paused for a moment and then continued impressively—"and in his trust in his lucky star. You are going to push your way through a web of ad-

versities. If you go to court you will learn something of the dissensions of princes, the jealousies of favourites, the hesitations between choice of parties, the difficulties of preserving the spiritual integrity. I hope you may make a good fight of it. But this much I can assure you, that in camp or court, in field or city, wherever men plot and deceive and dissimulate and kill, you will encounter no more malignant spirit than the man you have elected for your enemy. Farewell, my friend. Though you do not share my cunning, be sure that you shall share my prayers."

He rose as he spoke, and Henry Elizabeth, accepting this act as the hint of dismissal, stammered some sentences expressive of the deepest gratitude, and thereupon took his leave.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A CRY OF PLAYERS

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH set out to return to London with laggard footsteps and a humming head. If on the outward journey he had been all observation, noting every yard of the roadway, every dwelling by the way, well-nigh every flower in the fields, on the homeward course his gaze was listless and curiosity snored in his bosom. He was too busy with his thoughts to yield energy for externals. His mind had eaten at the magician's banquet more than it could comfortably assimilate, and Henry Elizabeth was suffering in consequence the pangs and qualms of mental indigestion. He was never a spirit to be terrified of anything, but he could be easily perplexed by an unfamiliar fact, and here in this bewildering London he seemed to be girdled about by unfamiliarities. He would have been amused if he had not been bemused by the actions which, as he gathered alike from Master Gallop and Dr. Dee, men deemed admirable, by the ambitions which men esteemed creditable, by the deeds which men were not ashamed to do, and by the rewards which Fortune, as interpreted by royal favour, accorded to these actions, ambitions, and deeds. Henry Elizabeth could not persuade himself that he should ever feel at home in such a hurly-burly world.

In the confusion of his mood one thought reigned over the welter: that he was resolved to achieve his purpose by his own diligence and determination. The antagonisms of princes, the quarrels of parties, the plots, conspiracies and intrigues of which he had heard were but the meshes of a somewhat incomprehensible share which it was his business and his right to pull asunder for the furtherance of his own desire.

He was so engrossed in these reflections that his habitual briskness of gait, even when he was sorely fuddled, had dwindled to a listless crawl, when all of a sudden his native

activity was restored to him by a strange commotion in his immediate neighbourhood. He came to a halt with pricked ears and looked about him sharply. He found himself upon a piece of open road guarded by hedges, with fields at either side. The noise that had stirred him from his stupor came from his left, a noise that was composed of a mingled clashing of steel and the shrill exuberance of voices. Nothing was visible to account for the tumult, but a crazy gate swaying upon its hinges hard by suggested a way of reconnaissance.

He hurried to the gate and leaning over it beheld the cause of the clamour. The field to which the gate gave access declining towards the river formed in the middle a hollow like a cup and in that shallow space a pair of men were moving who fought with sword and buckler furiously so that the air rang with the din, and shouted while they fought.

Midway up the farther curve of the grassy cup a youth was seated who was habited in a green jerkin and hose of bright blue cloth. He was plainly a yellow-headed youth, for he had cast his cap to the ground and his face showed smooth with an almost babyish freshness of complexion. But it was his behaviour rather than his appearance which momentarily distracted the spectator's attention from the brace of warriors. For the youth held his arms uplifted to heaven and agitated his hands this way and that, as he made excessive lamentation in a voice that sounded singularly clear and pleasant. And all the while, despite the loudness of his complaints and the despair of his gestures, an unchangeable calm reigned upon his fresh countenance.

It was clear to Henry Elizabeth that there was some trouble forward and that it was his unquestioned duty to take a hand in the game. So with no more ado he flung himself into the field brandishing his staff, and made at top speed towards the combatants. These on seeing his approach immediately suspended hostilities and turned to gape at him, while the youth apart brought his ululations abruptly to a conclusion.

While Henry Elizabeth came within a few yards of the armed men he halted and gave tongue.

"In heaven's name, my masters," he asked "why do ye brawl so furiously, and why does yonder youth carry himself so disconsolate. I promise you that if either of you has done him a wrong he will have me to reckon with."

As he spoke he whirled his baton above his head with as neat a precision as if he were a challenger to a bout at Brixham Fair. But to his astonishment the two adversaries that had but a moment before been hammering at each other so lustily, broke out into guffaws of laughter and their mirth was shared albeit less thunderously by the green and blue juvenal.

Henry Elizabeth was ever sensitive to derision and the gust of laughter galled him.

"Here is no laughing matter," he cried angrily. "Here is a quarrel and yonder seemingly its cause"—and as he spoke he indicated the youth with a gesture—"and I seek to know the meaning of the fray. If I do not get a civil answer quickly I shall know how to command it."

The trio still smiled but their merriment was remarkably chastened. For although they were three to one and though two of their number were armed with broadsword and buckler, the sturdy presence and the truculent mien of the intruder constituted a menace well worth placating. Therefore he that seemed the elder of the two swordsmen began to speak the stranger soft.

"Good sir," he said, "while I do not certainly understand your intrusion upon our sequestered business, I have little doubt from your demeanour and speech that you believe us twain to be engaged in a deliberate breach of the peace and that yonder youth is in some unhappy fashion involved in our conflict."

Henry Elizabeth lowered his staff and nodded his head.

"Aye," he answered, "I had some such maggot in my fancy, of which your soothness and civility would seem to free me. But if I misunderstood you I am still at a loss to know why you pass the fair evening in shoutings and strikings that trumpet a bloody endeavour."

The man who had made himself the spokesman of the three, and who seemed to do so by right of standing, favoured the newcomer with a grin of great good-humour, sheathed his steel, dropped his target to the ground and spoke in a jolly rotund voice.

"Good sir," he began, "your voice whispers to my ears and your carriage hints to my eyes that you are a foreigner; yet it may well be that you are not so alien to our good town

of London as to be ignorant of my name. I am Gregory Buttonshaw, very much at your service."

As he spoke the jovial fellow clapped a hand upon his heart and gave Henry Elizabeth the benefit of a courtly congee. But his rubicund face paled a little when he saw that Henry Elizabeth gazed at him in blank lack of knowledge.

"I must crave your pardon," said West Country, "but I am indeed, as you have contrived to divine, a stranger in these parts, which I trust may excuse me if I ask who the devil you are, Master Buttonshaw?"

Master Buttonshaw heaved a sigh and turning to his weaponed companion tipped him a wink which obviously devolved the duty of explanation. As for the youth he still squatted on the grass and followed the parley with an air of lively interest.

"John Candlejohn," said Master Buttonshaw solemnly, "decline unto this stranger my name and status and such poor qualities as I may command for claim upon his honour's consideration."

The man thus addressed was in all points of a most opposite composition to Master Buttonshaw. Where Buttonshaw was plump, Candlejohn was lean. Where Buttonshaw was red, Candlejohn was wan. Where Buttonshaw was jolly, Candlejohn was or seemed to be glum. He responded promptly enough to Buttonshaw's command and addressed the intruder in a voice that suggested rather the haranguing of a multitude than the addressing of a bewildered individual.

"My worthy friend and leader, Master Gregory Buttonshaw," he said, "desires me to illuminate your intelligence as to his standing in the world. He is the founder and the captain, the soul and body as it were, of Buttonshaw's Fellowship Players who have had the privilege of delighting thousands in every inn-yard of credit within the limits of London, and who furthermore have been in frequent request in the halls of the nobility and gentry."

Master Candlejohn mouthed this oration with an unctuous familiarity which pleased Master Buttonshaw, who nodded his head approvingly and served largely to enlighten Henry Elizabeth as to the manner of men with whom he was holding converse. Strolling players were not unknown in the larger towns of the West Country.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Master Button-

shaw," he declared, "and yours too, Master Candlejohn, and in good time that of the young gentleman who squats yonder. I take it that you were no more than in sport just now when I thought you to be in very grave earnest."

"You have hit it in the very heart of the target," said Master Buttonshaw cheerfully. "Good master Candlejohn and I were hard at it, rehearsing our mortal combat in my lord of Roehampton's Tragedy of 'Hector and Achilles,' while Master Mayblow, the gentle youth whom you behold yonder, sat apart and impersonated the Princess Polyxena weeping to behold the combat between her brother and her lover, a combat so tragical and fatal that whichever of the champions should gain the day, she, poor lass, must be indeed a loser."

As Master Buttonshaw thus explained a situation which had been a cause of so much wonder to Henry Elizabeth, the youth, who perceived that he had by now been included in the conversation, rose leisurely from his place on the grass and advanced to join the company. Henry Elizabeth noted that he was at great pains to walk with a mincing gait which was evidently foreign to his years and inclination.

"This," said Master Buttonshaw as the youth drew near, "is Master Martin Mayblow who delights a wise world by his presentment of crescent womanhood upon our stage. Believe me sir, he can counterfeit so exquisite a deception that the prentices in the pit are all a-tingle."

Henry Elizabeth looked with some disfavour on one whose life was, as it seemed to him, devoted to so paltry and unworthy an occupation. But the disfavour dwindled and dissipated with the nearer view of the lad. Martin Mayblow was a slim youth with a smooth face and a dimpled chin, and a little clear voice like the fine upper note of a flute. But there was a steadiness in his blue eyes and a firmness on his thin well-set lips that commended him to Henry Elizabeth as one that was capable of better things than gambolling in woman's gear.

Wherefore he held out his hand to young Mayblow, and though the lad's hand was small and fine Henry Elizabeth was pleased to note that it could command a grip of his own which suggested nerve and muscle behind the smooth skin and the womanish bearing. He said to himself that here was a lad of whom something might be made. So he spoke to Master

Mayblow civilly, saying that he was pleased to make his acquaintance.

At this point there came a pause and Henry Elizabeth was for resuming his road when Master Buttonshaw suggested that he and his colleagues were not a little tired and thirsty from their play of Greek and Trojan and would be very ready to take and proffer a little refreshment.

"There is an inn hard by, round the turn of the road, where they brew good ale. If your honour is inclined for a mug of honest liquor and will take it at our hands we shall be as pleased as proud, and as proud as pleased."

Now Henry Elizabeth had always believed himself to be of so dry a composition as to need the administration of a great deal of moisture to soften his clay. It had been a long tramp to Mortlake and if the sage had been generous in counsel he had made no tender of food or drink. Wherefore Henry Elizabeth found himself mightily minded to allay a thirst of which he now became distressingly conscious.

"I will be your guest for a first filling," he agreed with alacrity, "if you will be mine for the second, for I find I am oppressed with a dryness that will never be quenchable with a single cup."

"Agreed," said Master Buttonshaw briskly. He picked up his sword and buckler, adjusting the one to his girdle and the other to his back, and inviting Henry Elizabeth to accompany him led the way out of the field to the highroad. Here he started walking at a nimble pace with Henry Elizabeth for a companion, while Candlejohn and Mayblow, who seemed taciturn fellows enough, trudged silently at their heels. As they walked Henry Elizabeth could perceive that Master Buttonshaw was, as it were, over-viewing him with the tail of his eye and that if he talked idly his thoughts were not idle.

Presently he spoke as one that has come to resolution to say something of moment.

"Am I to take it . . ." he began, and then suddenly shifting his key he continued, "I have not thus far been graced with the favour of your name."

"My name," said his companion, "is Henry Elizabeth Braginton." He glanced sharply at the player as he spoke but Master Buttonshaw seemed to find nothing surprising in the nomenclature.

"Am I right," he continued, "in believing you to be a gentleman at ease?"

"Why," said Henry Elizabeth, "there is such a question as may very well carry two answers. For indeed I am very well at ease as far as my body is concerned, inasmuch as I have the wherewithal to feed and lodge me as I please, but as for my mind therein I am very ill at ease."

Master Buttonshaw expressed regret for both responses.

"I was in hope," he said, "that you might have a high heart and a low pocket."

"Why should you wish this?" Henry Elizabeth asked not a little perplexed.

"Marry thus," replied the player, "you seem a lad of a lively disposition, and if by any chance you had been as needy as you seem cheerful I might have cherished the hope of persuading you to join our fellowship."

"Do you mean that you would have me turn player?" Henry Elizabeth asked.

"That is just what I mean," Master Buttonshaw replied. "We are sadly in need of just such a strapping fellow as you at this present to play Ajax in my lord of Roehampton's tragedy. But here we are at the 'Brown Jug' where we may consider the matter further over a flagon of ale."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BROWN JUG

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH had walked but a little way along the road in company with his new acquaintance before he came to the inn which Master Buttonshaw had praised so highly. The "Brown Jug" stood very snugly on its little space of green by the side of the highway, and its outside looked as inviting as a well-meaning alehouse should look to a thirsty wayfarer. Under an open shed by the side of the inn a horse was tethered that seemed, Henry Elizabeth knew not how, to be in some way familiar. But it only teased his thought for a moment.

"Here," said Buttonshaw cheerfully, "we may drain a cup or two in good fellowship before we trudge to London."

As he spoke he pushed open the inn-door which swung ajar, and entered the passage with Henry Elizabeth close, at his heels, and the other pair immediately behind them. Master Buttonshaw led the way with the ease of familiarity, into the inn parlour, which proved indeed to look as pleasant a place as a drouthy man could desire for the spending of an hour, or less or more, in the company of a jug or flagon. It was a clean room and a cool room, with the fresh air from the river blowing through its open windows and fluttering its curtains and seeming to invite a tired traveller to rest and take his ease.

But if the parlour of the tavern was clean and cool, with its well-washed wainscot and its newly sanded floor and the pleasant freshness through the open windows, it was very far from quiet. There was a sprinkling of guests in the room, though the most were sitting mum over their mugs, and the disquiet was due to a man sitting in a corner who was seeing to that. He was a big fellow with a trim beard and a carriage of an excessive heartiness. Henry Elizabeth knew him



at once for the fellow that he had encountered on the road to Mortlake, the fellow that rode so rudely and bawled "Semiramis" as he rode. Dr. Dee, as he remembered, had given the man a name, but Henry Elizabeth could not recall it now as he sat and watched the fellow's antics. There was a great tankard of ale in front of the man to which he ever and anon applied himself with a great show of gusto, but it seemed to Henry Elizabeth at the first glance that he was not one that honestly loved either good ale or good fellowship and indeed that the one thing he dearly loved was the sound of his own voice. He had been talking when the party entered the room, and he continued talking without taking any notice of the newcomers, and for the first few minutes or so the newcomers paid no attention to what he was saying, but gathered themselves together at the end of a table and saw to it that they were supplied with ale.

"You may take it as an axiom, my good sir," he was announcing with a kind of hectoring good fellowship to his insignificant neighbour, "that one man is as good as another, or if you prefer the converse which is just as true, that one man is as bad as another. For my part I take a man as I find him and I care not what tongue he talks, nor what name he bears nor what flag he flies under. He is a brother man. That is the heart of the matter and all I ask is what kind of a brother he is going to prove to me, and what kind of a brother I am going to prove to him." Henry Elizabeth leaned a little forward in his place and began to listen more attentively. The place where he sat was in shadow and so afforded him a good opportunity of observing this babbler, who sat in a full light and sunned himself in it. Master Buttonshaw grinned and winked at his colleagues to note what was toward.

The landlord suggested with some deference that the man in question might prove to be an enemy. "What about the Spaniards, for instance," he suggested.

The talker lifted his tankard to his lips and set it down with the look of one that is in a very ecstasy of enjoyment.

"The Spaniards," he chuckled, "the Spaniards. I thought we should come to the Spaniards sooner or later."

"And why, pray, should we not come to the Spaniards," the landlord asked, "seeing that the Spaniard is the enemy of the Englishman?"

"Error, my good friend, error," the other asserted. "It is true that thanks to the machinations of those that call themselves our masters, and of those that call themselves the Spanish folks' masters, your honest Englishman and your honest Spaniard have been for a season in a state of giving and taking hard knocks. But bless your heart, we shall not be always at brawls, nor shall we, please heaven, always have masters to set us at war according to their pleasure, and then Don Hidalgo and honest John Englishman can be the good friends they ought always to have been."

"You seem to think well of the Spaniard, sir," said the host with a note of some surprise in his voice and as much surprise on his face as that blank countenance could compass. The voluble personage banged the table with his fist so that the tankard reeled and jiggled.

"Of course I think well of the Spaniard," he shouted, "and why should I not think well of the Spaniard, I pray you? I know something of the Señor Don and the Señor Don knows something of me, and we should do well to be friends with him, for I tell you to your beard that the Spaniard is as good a man as the Englishman, if not better."

As it has always been the amiable characteristic of the English race to endure patiently, if not to acquiesce in, any abuse of themselves so long as it is made with sufficient volume of voice, most of the listeners in the tavern parlour accepted without protest the pronouncement of the orator. The big man, swelling with complacency, threw back his head to laugh when his laughter was suddenly and rudely interrupted.

"That is a lie," said Henry Elizabeth from his corner and company. Buttonshaw rubbed his hands in satisfaction. The man turned and stared at the speaker.

"Who are you," he asked with a great air of indignation, "who talk so unmannerly?"

"I am an Englishman," said Henry Elizabeth quietly. "You, I take it from your manner of talking, must be a Spaniard. You seem to forget that we English are no good friends with Spain."

The orator stroked his beard for a moment or so in silence, the while he eyed his interrupter with a measuring glance of discontent. Neither body nor bearing seemed to be to his liking.

"I am no Spaniard . . ." he began pompously and got no further, for Henry Elizabeth promptly interrupted him.

"If you be no Spaniard, why do you talk like one?" he challenged. "You say you think well of the Spaniard, and no one but a Spaniard or it may be a renegade Englishman here and there does that."

"You argue like a fool," said the orator complacently, though with a certain wariness of eye in the direction of the door as of a tactician who makes sure that his rear is unimpeded. "I am neither Spanish nor renegade, but a sensible fellow who sees clearly that there are two sides to any question and that the Spaniard is as good—or if you like as bad—as the Englishman, to impartial scrutiny."

At this point he was interrupted rudely. Henry Elizabeth with great swiftness had covered the distance between himself and the speaker and had caught the man by the collar and the belt before he was aware of his intention. Swinging him with as much ease as if he had been an empty sack he shot him through the open door into the road where he lay sprawling.

The fellow was on his feet again in an instant. His knuckles were bruised and his beard was dusty, but he was still voluble. He shook a minatory finger at Henry Elizabeth.

"You are a common fellow," he cried, "you do not understand the decencies of debate, the amenities of argument."

Even in his heat he had an ear and a tongue for a phrase. Henry Elizabeth shrugged his shoulders.

"I have handled you better than you deserve," he said, "but I would have you remove, for your neighbourhood makes me sick, and I wish with all my heart you came of another nationality. Would you find a Jack Spaniard to belittle his country so? Be off with you."

This last command, given because Henry Elizabeth saw the man opening his mouth to speak again, was delivered with such a decision and accompanied by such a menacing advance that the man accepted the dictate of discretion. He ran to the shed where his horse was tethered, hastily mounted and took to the road, pursued by the derisive jeers of the company from the parlour who had trooped into the road to see the end of the sport. Henry Elizabeth felt a heavy hand fall upon his shoulder and turning, faced Master Buttonshaw.

"I was right glad," said the player, "to see you put that fellow down so roundly. I have seen the knave before, now and again, for he visits the play-house and places of public resort to air his vain talk. His name, as I think, is Gullingworth or Dullingworth. . . ."

"Lillingworth," cried Henry Elizabeth, who now remembered the name which Dr. Dee had given to the man.

"That is the name, sure enough," said Buttonshaw, "he is a man of means as I believe, with a fair house in the near country, but he has ever the good word for the Spaniards and I do not think him a true subject of the queen."

After the reckoning was called and settled by the player, who insisted on this as his right, the party walked together very pleasantly to London. Here Master Buttonshaw would fain have had his new friend share his dinner, but Henry Elizabeth had promised the host of the "Libbard" that he would eat at his ordinary so he thanked and declined and said farewell to his companions with many promises of meeting another day and that day a near one.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### RUFFIAN HALL

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH was back at the "Libbard" in time to dine comfortably and amply at the ordinary. When the meal was ended he set out to call on Master Gallop and remind him of his promise to present him to the famous fencing-master.

He found Master Gallop lingering complacently over the ruins of a comfortable dinner, and proceeded to justify his intrusion—though his new friend protested that no justification was needed for so welcome an event—by mentioning his eagerness to be made known to the man of arms.

"Say no more," protested Master Gallop, "say no more. Whenever you please to visit Ruffian Hall I will rejoice in my own proper person to conduct you to that seething pot of hot blood and to bring you acquainted with Master Polidori. You have but to name your day."

Henry Elizabeth was so much gratified at this readiness on the part of his new friend that he took advantage of it to suggest that there was no time like the present time for acting upon Master Gallop's proposal. So a few minutes found the pair trudging gallantly side by side through the labyrinth of London in the direction of Ruffian Hall.

The place lay in a region not far from the river that was as yet but little built over. Tenure of land was cheap in that quarter and afforded therefore opportunity to many of that adventurous kind whose trade it is to prey upon the pleasures of their fellows, opportunities to raise for themselves commodious shelters for their various arts. Here were abundance of booths for the selling of dainty wares; here were so-called gardens for the baiting of bulls and bears; here were taverns where the wise could fuddle and stay sound,

and the foolish might fuddle and grow sick; and here in the heart of it all was the Temple of Fence directed by Antonio Polidori.

Henry Elizabeth found himself in a large room that was well lighted through a sloping glazed roof. It was a bare, gaunt place, with a floor of carefully tended smoothness and high walls that were liberally furnished with pegs from which depended the cloaks, hats, rapiers and the like belongings of the visitors. Along the wall ran a row of benches on which at the time of Henry Elizabeth's entrance a number of young gentlemen were seated, occupied either in conversation or in witnessing what was going forward on the floor of the room. This same floor was occupied at different points by pairs of personages who were either advanced pupils of the master engaged in the painful practice of what they had already learned, or of beginners in various stages of proficiency, resolutely endeavouring to understand and obey the direction of Polidori's provosts. The Master himself happened at that moment to be disengaged, and in consequence he was standing in the middle of the floor watching the various groups of learners and opponents with a view to administering timely suggestion and correction. The entry of Henry Elizabeth, however, diverted his attention from the carriage of his scholars to the presence of the newcomers.

Master Gallop advanced towards the fencing-master with the ease and freedom of one that was used to good regard and caught him by the arm with a familiarity which the Italian accepted with a great show of geniality. Henry Elizabeth could see that the pair were talking of him. He could see also that a kind of lull had fallen upon the activity which had prevailed at the time of his arrival. He was aware that the attention of the company was directed not at all upon his companion but wholly upon himself, and as he never allowed his high opinion of himself to fall below its normal beat he took it for granted that they were impressed by his bulk and the general goodness of his presence. He had not a long time to wait before Master Gallop returned to him followed by the fencing-master.

With a mixture of suavity and swagger the Italian greeted the stranger in a very fluent English that carried no more than the trappings of a foreign accent, and begged to know

in what way he might have the happiness of serving him. Henry Elizabeth replied that he had come thither for the purpose of receiving some desirable instruction in a gentleman's carriage and the conduct of the sword.

Polidori, eyeing shrewdly the unusual bulk and the countrified appearance of his visitor, made him a profound salutation which had in it a point of irony unnoticed by Henry Elizabeth, and asked with a great air of assumed respect in which form of the noble art of self-defence his new patron desired to be made proficient. Was it sword and buckler, was it sword and dagger, was it this, was it that, was it the other? Henry Elizabeth answered that his immediate wish was for sword and dagger work, whereupon Polidori proffered him an immediate lesson.

Henry Elizabeth felt some reluctance to display his lack of sword craft in the presence of the numerous spectators, but the Italian affably assured him that the gentlefolk would take little notice of him, being already over familiar with the coming and going of novices in his academy of arms. As he spoke he summoned an attendant and bade him outfit Henry Elizabeth with the necessary equipment for a bout at sword and dagger play. He questioned Henry Elizabeth as to his proficiency and Henry Elizabeth, who never liked to make the least of himself or his abilities replied in vague terms intended to convey the idea that he was pretty well a master of his weapons but that his play from the lack of use needed a little polishing. The Italian, who saw through his confidence, only permitted himself the shadow of a smile as he picked his own weapons from their places on the wall and took his stand in the centre of the hall where he waited quietly until Henry Elizabeth, who was being stripped to his shirt and breeches, was ready to join him.

The lesson was a brief one and inglorious. Henry Elizabeth did not indeed carry himself so clownishly as on the day of the encounter by the forge, for he had a quick observation and a knack of using its fruit which made him something the better for his memorable encounter. But to the fencing master who did not know how bad he had been before, he seemed no more than a ridiculous posturer whom therefore it amused him to make a butt of for the entertainment of the young gentry seated around. Wherefore he prodded and

pinked and tickled Henry Elizabeth at his leisure and though he could not out-tire his strength he succeeded to his content in making him cut a sufficiently foolish figure in the eyes of an increasingly observant company. The grins that widened the watchful faces soon exploded into laughter, which the West Country man was too busy to heed. He hopped here and he lunged there, and he flourished his arm in a pathetic attempt to imitate the carriage of his adversary of Braginton. He wasted a vast amount of energy without becoming in the least fatigued, a fact which the Italian was quick enough to perceive. Seeing that he could not tire Henry Elizabeth he wearied of the easy game of baiting and befooling him and he lowered his sword in sign that the lesson was at an end.

Henry Elizabeth followed his opponent's example. He had been thoroughly interested in his bout and he was cheerful in his belief that he had carried himself pretty well. So it was in simple good faith that he asked the fencing master what he thought of his promise.

The Italian looked him over from head to heel with an exaggerated insolence of scrutiny. Then he asked him with a thin pretence of politeness if he was from the country? Henry Elizabeth, who did not guess the drift of his question, answered that he was indeed from the country, from the West Country.

"Then," said the Italian with a blandness that lightly oiled the vinegar of his speech, "I should counsel your worthiness to return with what speed you may to your West Country and apply your fingers to the countryman's true weapon, namely a spade, for I have the honour to assure you that you will never make a swordsman."

As he spoke he broke forth into a dry cackle of laughter and those that sat around swelled the hilarity with a chorus of grunts and chuckles that made the place more like a farm yard than a fencing hall. Henry Elizabeth who in the heat of his zeal had well nigh forgotten his witnesses, suddenly realised in a flush of all his blood that he was being made game of. He glared like an angry bull at the smooth Italian who taunted him, and then of a sudden he spoke and of a sudden he acted.

"You lie," he cried, and extending a swift left hand he flapped an open palm on the Italian's face. Instantly the Italian fell to the ground, but as instantly he leaped to his



feet again as if he had been sprung on wire and snatching up the dagger he had momentarily discarded he made a leap with lifted arm for Henry Elizabeth's breast. Henry Elizabeth waited the attack with squatted legs and seeking fingers but before the Italian could come within striking distance several of the spectators had risen and flung themselves between the opponents.

One of their number, who by the stateliness of his carriage and the richness of his habit seemed to assert himself as a leader in that mob of gallants, spoke peremptorily to the Italian.

"By God, Messer Polidori," he cried, "you carry yourself most foolishly. Here is a young gentleman from the country who seeks to learn the polite art, and because he is no more than a cushion for your cunning you presume to be insolent with him."

He turned from the fencing master who was now passive enough in the grasp of a couple of the younger gentlemen, and with a great show of courtesy addressed himself to Henry Elizabeth.

"I hope, sir," he said, "that our mirth has not offended your country freshness. I am very sure I am right in taking you to be gentle."

Henry Elizabeth who had abandoned his rustic attitude of self-defence the moment that he saw his adversary was overpowered, was ready to give a civil answer to a civil question.

"I come indeed from the country," he replied, "and London is a new land to me. In my own place and among my own people I am esteemed a gentleman."

"I knew that I could swear to so much," the other said cheerfully, "for although you handled your sword, God forgive you, as if it were some mongrel thing between a pitchfork and a cudgel, nevertheless I could detect ambition behind your ignorance, and the way you gave Polidori the lie proved you a true man."

If Henry Elizabeth's native self-satisfaction was flattered by the young gentleman's address it was also a little dashed by the easy patronage of the speaker and the splendour of his appearance. He was murmuring some words to the effect that he was glad to have the gentleman's approval, but the

youth interrupted him briskly as if there were no immediate need for any other voice to be heard but his own.

"Come hither, Polidori," he commanded, swinging a little in his poise so as to regard the fencing master. At this order those of his friends who were taking charge of the Italian released him, and he advanced respectfully towards his summoner.

"Polidori," said the young gentleman, "you have sadly misbehaved, and you owe this ebullient stranger an apology. You may be a pretty sword, but you must not insult rustic gentility if you have any tenderness for your face."

By this time the Italian had wholly recovered his self-possession and was to outward show the familiar urbane, politely ironic figure with which the youth of London was so well acquainted.

"I ask your pardon, my lord," he said blandly. Then he turned towards Henry Elizabeth and made him a bow. "And I ask this good gentleman's pardon also. But he will I am sure understand later when he comes to be a master of the sword that it is sometimes hard for the experienced fencer to be as tolerant as no doubt he should be of the beginner at the game. Let me assure your lordship"—and as he spoke he bowed again to the young nobleman—"and let me assure this high-spirited young gentleman"—and once more he bowed to Henry Elizabeth—"that if he will be so good as to forget our little misunderstanding and to apply himself as my pupil I can promise him that I will do my best to make him an adept in our craft."

"By God, that is handsomely said," the young nobleman declared, and his sentiment was loudly seconded by the other gallants present, and as loudly as any by Master Gallop. He whispered hurriedly in the ear of Henry Elizabeth, "this is the best blade in London. Cool your heat and take his offer."

But Henry Elizabeth was in no temper to be easily appeased. He turned to Master Gallop and questioned him in a low voice.

"Who is this young gentleman who acts as if the world were his possession?"

"That," replied Master Gallop in a voice that was hushed with a most profound respect, "is none other than my lord of Roehampton."

Now the mentioning of the young nobleman's name would

have meant to a Londoner the naming of perhaps the most brilliant of all the witty and gilded figures that glittered at the court. To Henry Elizabeth, however, it meant no such matter. He knew nothing of the young lord's wit, of his courage, of his foppery, his audacity, his master of poetry, his eloquence, his renown as a lover. Yet his name was not unfamiliar to Henry Elizabeth and for a moment he stood still trying to recall where he had heard it. Then he remembered Master Buttonshaw and the play of "Hector and Achilles," which came from the noble quill of the Lord Roehampton.

Even as he recalled this knowledge the young nobleman addressed him again courteously, reiterating the suggestion of a reconciliation.

Henry Elizabeth did not need to be twice entreated. He extended his hand with a frank countryside cordiality and a frank countryside smile that promised as plainly as if uttered by human speech to let bygones be bygones. The two men clasped close and wrung hands, and in a very few minutes an agreement was come to between them according to which Henry Elizabeth was to come to Ruffian Hall daily at that time of the day when Signore Polidori was most at leisure and if at the end of a month Henry Elizabeth had made a visible progress in the art, then he should pay the master's fees and continue his pupillage. But if at the end of the month he was not better or little better than he seemed at the present, then he should pay nothing at all for his lessons but should go his way with all speed and show Ruffian Hall a clean pair of heels as far as Antonio Polidori was concerned. These proposals Henry Elizabeth cheerfully endorsed, and thereafter, having saluted the company as gracefully as he could compass, he took his leave with Master Gallop.

## CHAPTER XIX

### MASTER CHELTENHAM

ON the morning which followed the day of Henry Elizabeth's visit to Ruffian Hall, those whose business took them this way or that way towards Cheapside might have paused to admire the spectacle of a large youth who was gaping at the windows of Goldsmiths' Row with an air of countrified astonishment and approval. The good city was not unused to the presence of strangers of all kinds of seeming and breeding and the mere presence of a stranger in the precincts of the Chepe would not be sufficient to arouse more than a ripple of interest on the human stream. But the appearance of such a stranger as Henry Elizabeth in front of Goldsmiths' Row was an event more than ordinarily qualified to stimulate public interest. He was big enough and broad enough and brave enough to arrest attention and command commendation. Men and women as they went this way and that, paused to stare at the stalwart fresh-faced stranger who was standing with his hands on his hips gazing at the goodly row of trim windows which formed as it were the crown of the comfortable glories of Goldsmiths' Row.

There seemed however to be no one in the public ways who took so keenly whetted an interest in the stranger as a spectator who had been looking with a hitherto uninterested gaze upon so much of the world at large as was visible from an open upper window in Goldsmiths' Row. This was a young woman who was attired with a richness that was distinctly in excess of the custom of her station in life but that seemed no more than the deservedly handsome setting to the attractions of her face and figure. In her person she commanded a pleasing plumpness that perhaps in one a little older might have been more roughly described as buxom. But if her form was maturer than her years demanded, in her face she displayed

all the charms of lively youth allied with the elements of very considerable beauty. If her features were not in strict regularity they still exercised a fascination to be admitted even by an uncompromising critic. Her colouring was brilliant, her eyes were wide and bright, her mouth was sweetly if exuberantly modelled, and a certain air of delicious audacity gave its provocative grace to a countenance crowned by an abundance of fair hair most daintily tired and disposed.

The young woman stared at Henry Elizabeth and believed in her heart that he was staring at her. In this she was wrong, for the young Squire of Braginton was for the moment occupied only with two matters, one of which was admiration and the other speculation. His admiration surrendered to the commanding appeal of the architecture of Goldsmiths' Row. There was nothing, not even in Exeter, the traveller admitted to himself reluctantly, which could honestly be said to compare with it. He knew no more of the noble art of building than he did of the practice of the other honourable fine arts, but of late and unconsciously he had found himself more impressionable and imaginative than he or any one else had guessed. It was as if the spark which had flown to his heart from the forge at Braginton had lit a flame in his being which shone into all manner of dark corners and illuminated possibilities hidden away therein and wholly unsuspected. He responded with all his being to calls which would have found him dull and indifferent but a little while ago.

If this was his admiration, his speculation was of another nature. He was asking himself which of these gracious habitations was the one he sought. There was nothing on the handsome face of the building to afford an answer to his question, so Henry Elizabeth, ceasing to gape, returned as it were to the world about him and accosted the person nearest who happened to be an elderly citizen leisurely making his way in the direction of East Chepe.

"Can you tell me, good sir," he asked with a polite salutation which the other returned as politely, "in which portion of yonder dwelling I may find the residence of Master Cheltenham, who as I believe abides there."

The elderly citizen smiled a little at the proof this speech afforded of the rusticity of the youth who addressed him.

"Young sir," he said civilly, "it is plain that you are a

stranger to the city if you have to ask such a question. Yonder is the abode of Master Cheltenham."

As he spoke he pointed with uplifted hand directly towards the window from which the young lady was observing humanity.

Henry Elizabeth followed his index and for the first time beheld the young woman who was seated at the window. At an earlier time he would have been prompt to pay to the possessor of so many charms the tribute of an approving and inviting gaze. Even now his lively senses assured him that the girl in the window was extremely pretty, with yellow hair and blue eyes, and that she was very certainly regarding him intently, but he immediately averted his glance, and after thanking his informant courteously, directed his steps towards the door which corresponded, as he judged, with the window wherein so much prettiness was installed.

When Henry Elizabeth had knocked at the indicated door it was promptly opened by a smug fellow of middle age who confirmed the stranger's suggestion that he was indeed on the threshold of the dwelling of Master Cheltenham. But having admitted thus much Master Cheltenham's clerk seemed extremely unwilling to admit anything more. When Henry Elizabeth asked if Master Cheltenham were within the smug person moved his head and agitated his hands dubiously. He could not say. It was not Master Cheltenham's custom to receive visitors at this hour of the day. It was not Master Cheltenham's custom to receive visitors at any hour of the day without due warning and notification. It would therefore, all things considered, be better if the young man were to state his business to the smug person addressing him, who would treasure it on his memory, until such a time as he might have opportunity of conferring with Master Cheltenham. The gist of the argument lay in the suggestion that the visitor should call again to-morrow or the next day at more reasonable hours to learn what Master Cheltenham had been pleased to decide.

While Smugface had been holding forth Henry Elizabeth had been looking about him with no small curiosity. He was undoubtedly disappointed in what he beheld or rather in what he did not behold. He had taken it into his head since he had learned from Master Pancras that Master Cheltenham was a goldsmith, that he would find the place heaped with gold

and jewels in dazzling abundance. Whereas he found himself looking into a small and meagrely appointed room whose principal objects of furniture were a desk, a stool, and a row of dingy account books on a single shelf. There was no sign of the precious metals or the precious stones which his simplicity had conceived to be the inevitable appurtenances of a goldsmith's house. He was so engrossed with his discovery that he failed to take notice of what the clerk was saying, and the clerk, perceiving this, immediately started upon a repetition of all that he had been previously declaiming. This time the visitor listened, but not in so absorbed a manner that he failed to notice that a door in the back wall of the room was silently opened some quarter of an inch or so, evidently to permit one that was within to hear what was going on outside.

Henry Elizabeth overheard the clerk's repetition with patience to an end. Then he uplifted his voice, which at all times commanded a lusty volume, and spoke thus in sturdy tones:

"Tell Master Cheltenham, if he be within hail, that Master Braginton of Braginton Hall by Tor Bay in Devon, desires to speak with him. Say further that Master Braginton is the son of the old friend and client of Master Cheltenham's, some of whose moneys are at this present in Master Cheltenham's hands."

As Henry Elizabeth had expected, the door at the back began to open wider and before the clerk had more than fairly started upon the third recital of his ritual it stood sufficiently ajar to allow for the free passage of a voice, without however affording any glimpse of its owner.

"Suffer Master Braginton to enter, Jenkin," said the voice of thin amiability. Smugface somewhat disconcerted at this interruption, at once made way, dumbly indicating with twitch of thumb the partially open doorway. Henry Elizabeth advanced, opened the door to its full width to permit of his passage and found himself face to face with the citizen he sought.

Master Cheltenham was a small spare man of a dry habit of body and a dry peaked face that as it peeped upon the world from the comforting capaciousness of his furred robe gave him something of a resemblance to a well-to-do mouse. His small eyes were shrewd and piercing and they now scrutinised his visitor very keenly. Something in his aspect appeared,

however, at once to please and amuse the goldsmith, for the sharpness of his regard shifted to a more kindly twinkle as he made Henry Elizabeth a dignified salutation.

"I gather," he said, "from what I chanced to hear of your conversation with my clerk that you are Master Braginton of Devon. Also that you are son of my old friend, Henry Braginton."

Henry Elizabeth nodded agreement. The goldsmith regarded him attentively.

"You do not take after your father," he said, more as if he were reflecting aloud to himself than addressing any definite auditor, "for he was short and lean whereas you—but to be sure nobody should know better than I that a little man may beget a big offspring. Belike you take after your mother whom I never knew."

"To deliver you from any doubt of my identity," said Henry Elizabeth, "let me say that I have come hither furnished with as I think due and sufficing credentials in the form of a letter addressed to yourself from one that declares much love and friendship for you, namely, Master John Pancras of Tor Bay."

As he spoke he drew from the breast of his doublet the letter of which he spoke and laid it upon the table in front of Master Cheltenham. The goldsmith regarded the superscription with a pleased smile.

"Pray be seated, young sir," he said to Henry Elizabeth with a gesture towards a comfortable chair that faced his own, "while I take the opportunity of renewing my intercourse with that most learned of men and most instructive and agreeable of companions."

As he spoke he placed on his nose a large pair of horn-rimmed spectacles—with the effect for the moment of transforming him from a mouse into an owl—and after breaking the seal of Master Pancras' letter proceeded to read it slowly with a plainly visible gusto as if he were tasting and enjoying the contents.

When he had finished its perusal he removed his glasses and became the mouse again.

"This letter," he said, "is very plainly from my gossip Pancras, and in it he plainly delineates its bearer both as to his physical proportions, manner of carriage, and mental qualities, all with so sure and unmistakeable a touch as could leave



no manner of doubt in any mind that you are in very fact what you have already declared yourself to be."

Henry Elizabeth was conscious of two distinct moods of mind as he listened to the speech of Master Cheltenham. The first prompted him to assert roundly that the statement of a Master of Braginton needed no support written or oral from any man. But he had already grown so far wiser with his journey as to remember that Middlesex was not Devon, and that a cautious London citizen had a right to be wary.

So he swallowed his momentary resentment and allowed himself to linger for a little in his second mood. This was one of sheer curiosity, curiosity as to what Master Pancras might have written concerning him, Henry Elizabeth Braginton, in that letter over which he had noticed Master Cheltenham to smile. But he felt a sudden shame to put a question which might, very rightly, meet with a rebuff, so he swallowed the inclination in its turn.

"I am glad," he said, "that we are agreed as to my being, for your confirmation of my own belief is far from unwelcome to one who feels not a little strange in this great London of yours."

Master Cheltenham narrowed his eyes, and had he really been a mouse would have pricked up his ears, at this utterance of his visitor, which seemed to suggest a something lacking in the portrait penned by his correspondent.

"Well, well," he said, "we will take it that you are Master Braginton as I am Master Cheltenham, and are ready to do business on that understanding. For I gather from this letter that you come to me on business."

Henry Elizabeth nodded.

"I always understood," he answered, "from my father that a certain sum of money was entrusted to your hands, to be put out to due and lawful accretion and controlled for me until such a time as I might have need of it."

"That is exact," Master Cheltenham agreed. "Indeed, if I remember, I have written to you to that effect from time to time since your father's demise, but my memory cannot at this moment recall any acknowledgment on your part of my communications."

Henry Elizabeth had the grace to colour a little at the delicately administered rebuke of the goldsmith.

"I crave your pardon, honoured sir, with all my heart," he declared, "for my most blameworthy remissness." Even as he spoke he was aware of a sudden astonishment to find himself making free admission that he could possibly be wrong in anything. "But the truth is that I can live so well at my ease on my estate of Braginton that I gave no great thought to the sum that might be set apart for me, and for a need never likely to arise, in London. But since the need has arisen and has even brought me so far as to London Town for a very definite purpose I shall in truth be glad to know what monetary aid I can count upon at your hands."

The goldsmith drew his furred gown closer over his knees and then stroked it thoughtfully with his thin hands, while his alert eyes observed his visitor with a curiously blended expression of envy and commiseration. Envy, no doubt, at youth embarking on an adventure and eager for gold to grease the wheels of his chariot. Commiseration, perhaps, for one that must needs be bustling and spending money when it was so much wiser to sit quietly at home and make it.

"I cannot tell you exactly, Master Braginton," he said "how much money stands at this moment to your credit without consulting my books. But at least I can assure you that it is quite a goodly sum, such as should suffice for any creditable and intelligent purpose like that which I make no doubt has summoned you to London. I have had so much disinterested pleasure in watching it increase that I am conscious of a kind of regard at your coming, Master Braginton, lest the heat of your youth should melt it too rapidly."

"Believe me," the young man assured him earnestly, "I propose only to make such use of the money you hold for me as, on my honour, I believe to be the best and wisest for me. What that use may be I cannot inform you, but you may take my word for my good intent."

Master Cheltenham nodded and smiled as if he had heard such words more than once before and would be very likely to hear them more than once again.

"However that may be," he said, "I will tell you what your standing is to the end of last year."

## CHAPTER XX

### MAUDLIN

**H**E rose as he spoke with a jingling of keys and advanced towards a kind of coffer or strong-box, stoutly padlocked, that stood upon a solid oaken chest in a corner of the room. But before he had time to unlock this receptacle his action was interrupted. A door opposite to that by which Henry Elizabeth had entered and which conducted seemingly to and from the dwelling part of the building was suddenly opened and a third person entered abruptly into the room. This third person to Henry Elizabeth's surprise proved to be the young female whom he had noted some little time before at an upper window, but whose existence he had completely forgotten. He observed again that she was comely, with very yellow hair and very blue eyes.

The young woman seemed to be enveloped in as present an oblivion of the presence of a stranger, for though she stood in full view of Henry Elizabeth and must therefore have held him in full regard she acted and spoke with a cheerful unconsciousness of his being. While Master Cheltenham turned testily at the sound of the opened door Henry Elizabeth had full opportunity to observe the newcomer and to find her exceedingly well-favoured. Her face showed even prettier on a near acquaintance and she carried her plump proportions with the springy ease of perfervid youth.

It flattered the visitor's vanity to make an easy guess as to the reason for this pleasing apparation. The maid had seen him from above, and seeing had admired, and admiring had descended, on some pretext or other, to have a nearer look. It seemed from what followed that his guess was shrewd.

"Father," the girl began, staring all the while in the direction of the stranger but feigning audaciously to be totally unaware of his presence, "I came to ask you——"

But here the look of extreme irritation on the habitually amiable countenance of Master Cheltenham made it plain to the maid that she must needs take notice of the fact that an unfamiliar person was present.

"Dear Lord," she cried, with a pretty flush and a simper, before her father could ejaculate a syllable of the reproof that was clearly coming, "I thought you were all alone or I should never have made bold to intrude." As, though she thus excused herself, the young woman showed no readiness to take her departure, Master Cheltenham spoke and spoke sharply.

"Begone," he commanded, "you have no call to come here in my hours of business whether I be alone or no. But now that you see I am not alone, begone, I say."

In spite of the peremptoriness in Master Cheltenham's tone the young person who had hailed him as father manifested no alacrity to obey the parental order.

"Nay, but father——" she began in a pretty, pleading voice, while she assumed an air of great confusion which did not prevent her from keeping her gaze fixed very steadily upon the guest, "I did but seek——"

"Whatever you seek, seek it some other time," Master Cheltenham commanded angrily. "I have business on hand which is too important to be troubled by your whimsies."

The damsel made here a feint of fluttered withdrawal but promptly suffered her departure to be arrested when Henry Elizabeth, who had risen to his feet, turned to Master Cheltenham and begged him to attend to what the young lady had to say, assuring him and her that his own poor business would wait most cheerfully upon her pleasure. Master Cheltenham shrugged his shoulders while the girl's smooth cheeks dimpled in gratitude.

"This is my daughter Maudlin, Master Braginton," said the goldsmith, "and as you will deduce from her bearing, a spoilt forward minx who abuses her father's patience most shamefully."

Henry Elizabeth believed that Master Cheltenham's annoyance was not very deeply seated, and indeed he thought that it would be hard to cherish long any feeling of anger against so pleasing a creature as the young woman to whom he now made the best bow at his command.

"I count myself much favoured," he declared, but with less enthusiasm than he would have manifested only a few days earlier, "to make your daughter's acquaintance."

It would have been in custom for the speaker to have offered a salute to the young lady's cheek, or at least to her hand, but Henry Elizabeth offered neither of these tributes. He found himself not merely disinclined but positively unwilling to do so. Had he not known the reason for his inaction he would have believed himself to be suddenly taken ill.

Wherefore he made the young woman a bow and the young woman, with a shadow of disappointment upon her pretty face, dipped him a curtesy; after which ceremonial the two young people stood staring at one another in silence, though so much of lively admiration was depicted on the face of the girl as caused Master Cheltenham to pucker his forehead into a frown.

"Be off with you, baggage," he said in a tone, milder than the words, which showed plainly that he was not over-used to command his daughter, "for Master Braginton and I have private business together and would therefore fain be left to ourselves."

It was surprising to Henry Elizabeth to find himself quietly concurring in Master Cheltenham's utterance. If anyone had told him but a few poor days ago that he would have preferred the single company of an elderly money-dealer to that same company multiplied by the presence of a comely and obviously good-humoured damsel with yellow hair and blue eyes, he would have given his informant the lie.

But since then the Lady of the Forge had come into the range of his knowledge and made the rest of womankind a thing of indifference. He judged however that it was his obvious duty to voice some protest against the goldsmith's command.

"Indeed, Master Cheltenham," he protested, "if your daughter has need of your society my business may very well stand aside for the nonce."

Master Cheltenham, however, proved obdurate, and after another exchange of bow and curtesy Mistress Maudlin slipped from the room and left her father and his visitor to themselves.

"A bold piece," said the goldsmith thoughtfully, "a bold piece as her mother was before her. There were times when

I found it strange to have such a wife. There are times when I find it strange to have such a daughter. Well, well, life is a queer business. Where were we, Master Braginton, where were we?"

"You were about to tell me what sum you held in my favour to the end of last year," said Henry Elizabeth, who was glad to get back to the practicalities again.

"True," said Master Cheltenham, "true, so I was." He opened the strong box and withdrew a vellum bound volume from its contents, which appeared to consist chiefly of similar vellum-bound volumes.

He opened the book which he held in his hand and after turning a few pages came to the place where the writing ceased. He adjusted his spectacles and then read aloud to Henry Elizabeth the figures of a very handsome sum which was at least three times as large as he had expected to find himself able to command.

"I take it," said Master Cheltenham with a look of mild slyness at his client, "that you would probably like to carry home a certain amount of cash in your pockets for your immediate needs."

Henry Elizabeth admitting that such was his mind, suggested that one hundred pounds would be a pleasant sum to handle immediately. To the goldsmith's alarm at the danger of his being robbed with so large an amount of gold on his person Henry Elizabeth gave laughing assurance that he might be relied upon to hold his own even in London. Whereupon Master Cheltenham counted the money in broad gold pieces into a leather bag and handed them over to Henry Elizabeth, who slipped them into his breeches pocket with a great air of unconcern.

Master Cheltenham engaged Henry Elizabeth to dine with him on the following day and then solemnly escorted him into the outer room where Smugface was still busy with his accounts. The goldsmith ushered his visitor into the street with many expressions of satisfaction at making his acquaintance, to which Henry Elizabeth responded heartily. Then the door closed behind him and the Master of Braginton started to return to his lodging with his precious and welcome burden.

He had not proceeded very far on his journey when at a crowded corner he collided with a young woman who was

hastening in an opposite direction. As the man and woman separated, each voluble in apology, Henry Elizabeth perceived to his surprise that the female was no other than the goldsmith's daughter, who for her part was, or at least seemed to be, no less surprised to meet again her parent's client.

"Dear Lord," she cried, "here is a chance in a thousand. I did but slip out for an instant to get my father some strong water for his supper which I had forgotten to bespeak and to change a word with a neighbour in Change Alley, and then to think that I should run into you of all men in the world, whom I did not count to see again this many a long day—if ever," she added with a pretty little sigh and a prettier little smile.

Henry Elizabeth smiled back at the young woman with the good humour that burgeons from self-approval. It was plain that she admired him as he was wont to be admired by the rustic divinities of his own county and it was not possible even for his changed heart not to warm a little at the tribute of her regard.

"To-morrow come never is no saying between friends," he declared, "and I hope we shall be friends, Mistress Maudlin."

The girl simpered and dipped him a curtsy for all that they stood in the bustling street. Henry Elizabeth began to think that it was time to make an end of talk.

"I am feasting with your father," he said, "no later than to-morrow."

"It will be a good day for us," Maudlin interrupted, while her eyes invited him to admire. Henry Elizabeth did admire. This smooth-spoken, city-bred, comely girl was a creature out of his experience. He might have found her delightful if he had never seen a certain face. As it was he wished her good day with as courtly a salutation as he could command and went on his way. But for the life of him he could not forbear to turn his head after he had gone a little way, and there was the girl standing like a stock in the street and staring after him. Whereupon Henry Elizabeth turned his head no more but went on his road briskly.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A DINNER IN THE CITY

ON the following morning Henry Elizabeth woke from an untroubled sleep to troubled thoughts. He found himself aware that he had something to do which at the same time attracted and repelled him. But in the first moment of slowly clarifying consciousness he could not determine what the thing was nor the wherefore of either feeling. It was not until he experienced the chill of his bare feet on the rushes and the kiss of the spring air on his face that he realized the duty of the day, the duty or the pleasure, whichever it was to be called, of dining with Master Cheltenham. Henry Elizabeth sat on the edge of his bed and stared at his toes as if he found them unfamiliar; but he was not thinking of them at all. He was thinking, so he told himself, of the good goldsmith, yet he knew in the pit of his stomach that he was lying and that he was really thinking of the goldsmith's daughter. Maudlin had not been much in his thoughts since his parting from her, Maudlin made no figure in his dreams, if he had dreamed any dreams at all, which he could not remember. Oddly enough the image of the girl seemed to have intensified in his mind with the passage of the night. He saw her before him as clearly as if she had been standing in the room with the fresh wind tickling her yellow hair and the clear sunlight enlivening her pink cheeks. Almost he wished that he could open the door and bid the pretty phantom go. He was far from being a philosopher, but because he was a West Country man he was by the necessity of birth superstitious and believed in the influence of morning thoughts as well as of morning visions. He had a feeling which irked him, that Maudlin Cheltenham wished to count for something in his life. That alone would have vexed him little, for he was not over-sensi-



tive to other people's wishes; but he had also the feeling that she might succeed in counting for something in his life. It was not that he feared the influence of her blue eyes and her yellow hair and her obvious purpose to allure. These would have amused him when this waning moon was young. They offered him no promise of amusement now. But he had a feeling which was uneasy to the point of being uncomfortable that in this dimpled, winsome damsel he had encountered something which he would rather not have encountered. He did not fork his fist against the evil eye, for his feeling was not that of aversion to something uncanny. Slowly sifting his wits as he donned his garments, it seemed to him, by and by, that he had got to the root of the matter. Behind the blue eyes of Maudlin lived a strong will, the will of a man, a will that might be pitted against his own. When he came to this conclusion it seemed so ridiculous that a jolly, comfortable, plump lass could be endowed so manly, that he began to laugh as he fastened his breeches; but somehow the laughter died away ere he tied the last point. Somewhat out of temper with himself for thinking of the maid at all, and with the maid for forcing herself upon his thoughts, he bade her mentally to go to the devil, and descended to break his fast.

He spent the morning at Ruffian Hall, to which he could now find his way unaided, being of those cunning countryside fellows who if they go but once to a place can guide their course thereafter with the surety of a padding animal. He was greeted by Messer Polidori with an affability which showed no memory of the previous squabble.

The school was little crowded, for Henry Elizabeth came at an early hour, and my lord the poet was not among the pupils or patrons who were present during the period of his visit. The Italian, with an excess of courtesy which seemed nothing singular to his visitor, took him in hand himself instead of delivering him to one of his provosts as he would have done in the case of a stranger lacking the favour of Lord Roehampton. For it was the young nobleman's grace and protection which enabled the Italian to practise his art and make his fortune untroubled by the aggressive laws which menaced the practisers of all such crafts as ministered to the entertainment of life. Polidori instructed his pupil with a grave earnestness which would have put him completely at

his ease, if he had had any need of such encouragement. He took him through the earliest letters of the alphabet of the art of the splendid weapon, and was surprised, though he was careful not to show it, by the unexpected aptitude with which the clownish fellow from the country—for so he esteemed him—followed his teaching and copied his example. He was unaware of the deadly earnestness with which Henry Elizabeth began his task, of his fierce determination to lose no time in acquiring the first necessity of a gentleman.

Henry Elizabeth had pondered not a little on those words of Dr. Dee's in which the magician had offered to impregnate him, as it were, with a subtle spirit which would enable him to learn what he pleased with a mysterious rapidity. He was quite disposed to believe in sorcery though he was unwilling to avail himself of its aid, but in thinking the matter over he came to the conclusion that he needed no better help than his own will to accomplish his desire. And indeed that morning he laboured with a zeal and zest that left him with tingling muscles and bathed in sweat like a river god; but that left him also with a clear understanding of what he had to do, and how best he might come to do it.

When the lesson was over the Italian uttered some civil compliment, and Henry Elizabeth went his way very hopeful. He was back at the Libbard in good time to shift his linen and his outer gear before making his way to the Cheape. He had brought little with him in his portmanteau save a single change and the birthday garments he had worn on his coming of age, and which he believed to be as fine as anything borne by Solomon of old time. The wine stains were still there, and more apparent to him now than they had been on that night in Braginton, but he determined to ignore them, and indeed he cut a fine figure in his velvet suit as he stepped across the Libbard's threshold and steered for Goldsmith's Row.

When Henry Elizabeth got to Goldsmith's Row he was received at Master Cheltenham's door by his old friend Smug-face, whose name he now knew to be Gabriel Pike, but this time his reception was ostensibly all smiles. The goldsmith's clerk was brisk with bows and salutations, as he ushered the visitor up the private stair; and if the smiles of welcome shifted into the sourness of grimace, Henry Elizabeth's broad

back was turned and he heeded the change as little as if he had seen it.

When he was ushered into Master Cheltenham's sitting-room he could not help being struck by the difference between the dinginess of the goldsmith's offices and the splendour of the apartment in which he now found himself. Henry Elizabeth, himself, at Braginton cared little for making a show, for he entertained no company, but he had been once or twice in the mansions of neighbouring gentry—though indeed he had never been persuaded to pay a second visit—and he had once accepted an invitation to dinner from his worship the Mayor of Exeter, at which he had got very cheerfully drunk. He remembered dimly some considerable show of rich having in the houses of the Devonshire gentry, and the still greater glories of the mayoral mansion. But nothing that he had ever seen came near to the luxury of Master Cheltenham's living-room. The panelled walls were ranged with portraits in great gilded frames of a quantity of solemn personages in furred robes and chains of gold who, as he learned later, were lord mayors and aldermen and other dignitaries of the city of London. An ancient sideboard of cunningly carved oak displayed noble vessels of gold and silver, choice oriental porcelain and fantastic triumphs of the costliest Venetian glass. With an extravagance unusual to the time the floor of Master Cheltenham's living-room was strewn with a lavish abundance of the skins of wild animals. Henry Elizabeth was as ignorant as a pig of the peltry of any country but his own, but he was to learn thereafter, through the kindly instruction of his host, that these skins were rare and noble specimens of bear and leopard, of lion and tiger, and of foxes of many colours.

As Henry Elizabeth trod these trophies towards the cushioned chair which his host quitted to meet him, he felt with a dim sense of unwelcome that there were dwellings better appointed than Braginton Manor, though none more agreeable to abide in.

He had barely changed a few words with his host, when a further door opened and Maudlin came into the room. Henry Elizabeth, where he sat facing her, stared at her for a moment in plain admiration before he rose to his feet in greeting. Yesterday the girl had been habited with a richness above the usage of a citizen's daughter, even when that citizen was

such a goldsmith as Master Cheltenham. To-day she seemed habited like a queen in a gown of costly stuff and shining colour, which served as a frame of sombre glory to her beauty. About her neck lay a circle of pearls that no court lady could have bettered, with a pendant emerald set in diamonds that would have made a life's fortune for half a dozen gallants. Henry Elizabeth cared little for the girl's clothes and less for her jewels, but they had their effect none the less, as they had been meant to have, on his appreciation of gracious vision.

She moved towards him as swimmingly as if she had been trained by a Master of Ceremonies, and as firmly as if she were walking on a Devonshire down. Her face was dimpled with smiles; her eyes shone with kind fire; her warm lips were parted in generous welcome. Henry Elizabeth felt a strange uneasiness pinching at his gizzard. Yet in another moment his vague misgiving vanished as he took the girl's hand. Her manner was as easy as cool air; her greeting was as sweet and fresh as buttermilk; there was no sign on her blithe face that his coming could mean more to her than the coming of any guest of her father's.

"God give you good day, Master Braginton," she said, and her voice was very pleasant to hear as she spoke, but there was no hint in it of more than honest everyday courtesy. Henry Elizabeth found himself wondering how he could ever have thought foolish thoughts of this pretty, simple child.

He gave her back her greeting very gaily, in his sudden sense of restored equanimity, while the goldsmith beamed affability.

"Dinner is ready, father," Maudlin said to the goldsmith, dipping a curtsy as she spoke, "whenever you are ready for it."

The goldsmith gave a glance at a great clock upon the wall.

"Our other guest is late," he said drily, "but he knows, or should know, my habits of punctuality. Quarter of an hour's law is the most I give to any man or would give to any woman, save indeed the Queen's Majesty." He turned to Henry Elizabeth.

"Will you give my daughter your hand to our modest board."

Henry Elizabeth, who had heard with some sinking of the spirit that another guest was expected—for he had gained a

lively appetite from his morning at Ruffian Hall—was delighted to learn that the lingerer was not to be tarried for. So he gave his hand to Mistress Maudlin with alacrity and obeyed her guidance into the adjoining room, while Master Cheltenham followed slowly in their wake.

Henry Elizabeth was ripe to take a brisk interest in the banquet which Master Cheltenham had provided in his honour. Master Cheltenham himself favoured a spare diet as is the wont, for the most part, of those whose chief business in life is the amassing of money. But he had all a rich man's love of display, when occasion called for it, and he made it evident that afternoon that he considered Henry Elizabeth's visit such an occasion.

Though Henry Elizabeth was careful to command his countenance from any sign of surprise or admiration at the opulence of the goldsmith's table, he was in secret not a little impressed by the lavish show of gold plate and silver plate and rare glass which shone and glowed before him.

At first the feast progressed very quietly. Maudlin did not say much, but when she did speak, it was with a pretty decision, as of one who knew her own mind. She showed a healthy appetite for her meal, but she ate daintily. She eyed the visitor a good deal without seeming to do so.

Master Cheltenham, eating sparingly and sipping an old wine, sustained the main of the conversation. The slight restraint which must exist amongst persons who know each other but little and meet in fellowship for the first time was growing into a warmer intimacy which was suddenly interrupted.

A gentleman was ushered into the room, at the sight of whom Master Cheltenham moved to his feet and advanced his hand, while his daughter, rising from where she sat, dipped him a profound curtsy.

The newcomer, who began by apologizing in a loud voice for his late arrival, and by so wording his apology as to make it plain that to his mind it did not matter a particle when he arrived, so long as he did arrive sometime or other, was chiefly remarkable for the fact that he was clad with an extravagant gorgeousness of attire that might well make the spectator wink. It parodied absurdly with the widest vagaries of the most fantastic of court fops, but in its colours as in its design, its adornments as in its materials, it proclaimed its

wearer as one that had no true pretension to a knowledge of dress. This indeed was plain enough to Henry Elizabeth, who had learned from the outward seeming of the young nobles who thronged Polidori's Academy how an exquisite English gentleman should clothe his body. But, for the moment, Henry Elizabeth was less interested in the clothes than in the man, for above the gaudy bad taste of the garments he beheld a familiar face.

Henry Elizabeth recognized, with great entertainment in the recognition, that Master Cheltenham's tardy guest was no other than the angry horseman he had encountered on the way to Mortlake, and with whom he had afterwards brawled in the tavern. He had quite forgotten the name which Dr. Dee had given to the man, but it was instantly recalled to his memory as Master Cheltenham, taking the newcomer by the hand, advanced him to the table and begged Master Braginton to know and be made known to his very good friend, Master Lillingworth, of Lillingworth Hall, in Highgate.

Henry Elizabeth could see at once, by the angry colour that ruddled the newcomer's cheeks, that he remembered the former meetings—which indeed Henry Elizabeth shrewdly divined his egregious vanity would scarcely permit him to forget. But he saw, also, in the stare of the Highgate Squire a prompt determination to affect a forgetfulness of what had occurred, an affectation which Henry Elizabeth was perfectly willing to humour. So he returned, with becoming gravity and no sign of recognition, Master Lillingworth's awkward overdone salutation.

The progress of the dinner afforded Henry Elizabeth abundance both of information and entertainment. He soon was aware that Master Lillingworth was an admirer of the goldsmith's daughter, and he made a shrewd guess that hitherto the goldsmith's daughter had been ready enough to encourage his attentions, with, as he little doubted, the full approval of her father.

Master Lillingworth had seated himself pompously in the vacant chair opposite to his host, and had helped himself liberally to the viands and vintages that were offered him. With his arrival the conversation had taken a new turn, for it was plain that the Highgate squire was of a mind to direct its course himself. The affairs of state were evidently his fav-

purite theme, and though on this occasion he refrained from extolling the virtues of the Spaniard, he embarked very presently upon a topic little less controversial. Filling himself a bumper of wine, he lifted his glass and looked over its rim towards Master Cheltenham.

"I hope," he said, "I have your permission to drink a toast to a lady now in sad case, who deserves a fairer fortune, I mean, of course, the prisoner of Bolton."

Maudlin, whose face at the beginning of this speech had taken on something of a simper, as of one who expects a tribute to her charms, looked at Master Lillingworth in some surprise. Her father's grave face stood the challenge unchanged.

"Is it of the Scots queen that you speak?" he asked quietly. "If so, she certainly is an unhappy lady, though how far her unhappiness is of her own doing is a matter we need not discuss. But I am willing to drink her health and such good fortune as she may deserve."

The manner of Master Cheltenham's speech would have been sufficient to reprove a more sensitive personage, but Master Lillingworth was too thick-skinned to be rebuffed. He rose in his seat and solemnly lifted his glass while Henry Elizabeth stared at him with no little amazement. The West Country man knew almost as little of what was going on in the world of politics about him as if he had belonged to an earlier generation.

"I drink," Master Lillingworth declaimed solemnly, "to the health of her gracious majesty the Queen of Scots, now in exile from her dominions."

Master Cheltenham, remaining seated, did no more than lift his beaker to his lips, Mistress Maudlin did nothing, but Henry Elizabeth, never unwilling to honour good liquor, took a pull at his tankard. Master Lillingworth, apparently very well satisfied with himself, sat down again, and thrusting his hand in to the breast of his doublet, produced therefrom a small leather case which he opened, disclosing a miniature framed in gold. After gazing at it rapturously for a few seconds he handed the case to Maudlin.

"Is not that," he asked, "the face of a fair and great lady, whom all chivalrous spirits should be proud to serve?"

"She is indeed very comely," Maudlin commented with a

tinge of asperity in her voice as she passed the face to her father, who looked at it and, nodding his head, in his turn conveyed it to the hand of Henry Elizabeth.

The West Country man took the case with no great interest, but scarcely had he glanced at the portrait it contained than he came near to let it fall from his fingers in sheer astonishment; for it seemed to him for a moment that he was looking face to face with Morgana le Fay, the Lady of the Forge. There was the same dark hair, the same dark eyes, the same grave glorious beauty. Then as his senses cleared it seemed to him that it was not indeed her image though strangely like her, and he turned in question to Lillingworth.

"Is this," he queried, "the likeness of the Queen of Scots?"

"Her latest portrait," responded Lillingworth with a great pride in his voice and manner, "and conveyed to me as a special favour by the good hand of Sir Matthew Favill."

For a moment the room seemed to be reeling round Henry Elizabeth. His head swam and his pulses throbbed; then he became conscious that the eyes of Maudlin were fixed on him with a great curiosity, and with an effort he recovered his composure.

He returned the picture to Lillingworth, who seemed as if he were about to speak, but before he could do so Master Cheltenham broke in.

"Sir Matthew Favill," he said in some surprise, "I did not think he was in England at this time."

Lillingworth appeared a little embarrassed.

"Not at this time," he answered hastily, "not for a long time, but a friend of his came to England on private business a while ago, and by him Sir Matthew sent me this picture of her majesty."

Henry Elizabeth's wits were busy working. It had been on the tip of his tongue to correct the speaker and convict him of falsehood, but already he had learnt the wisdom of thought before speech, and he held his peace. He felt that he was on the edge of a discovery which might be of great moment to himself. That the portrait which he had just seen was so like the countenance of the woman he loved was in itself a wonder, but when it was thus associated with the name of the man he hated, the wonder seemed more than doubled.



He suddenly felt that he was set upon a path where it behooved him to walk warily.

"Your Queen's face," he said slowly with an air of unconcern, "is very like the face——" He paused for a moment as if he had said enough and meant to say no more, but Master Lillingworth caught him up promptly.

"Like the face——" he said in a voice that was unreasonably angry, "like what face I pray you?"

Henry Elizabeth returned his irate gaze with a look of great innocence.

"It reminded me," he said, "of someone I saw once long ago, but as I look again I note that it is in many ways very different."

He was pleased to see that whatever suspicions had aroused Master Lillingworth's irritation were allayed by his reply. He was less pleased to discern that Maudlin was still watching him with the same air of curiosity.

By this time the repast was drawing to its close, and Maudlin rose from the table. She addressed her father.

"I know, sir," she said, "that you have some occasion for private speech with Master Lillingworth. If Master Braginton will condescend to accompany me into the other room I will entertain him with some music while you discuss your business."

Master Lillingworth, whose steady potations had not served to increase his amiability, did not seem best pleased by this suggestion. But the goldsmith nodded his head.

"Well bethought, daughter," he said, and turning to Henry Elizabeth he continued, "the girl has a pleasing voice, and we shall not be absent long enough to suffer you to tire of it."

When Henry Elizabeth found himself alone with the girl in the adjoining room Maudlin moved towards a small table against the wall on which a pair of virginals reposed, and ran her fingers lightly over the jacks. She began to play a gay little tune, yet she sang no song to the air, but instead spoke directly to the young man, keeping her words in accord with the rhythm.

"What think you of Master Lillingworth?" she asked, balancing her words to the lilt of the time. Henry Elizabeth was keen enough to perceive that the girl wished those in the other room to believe that she was indeed singing to him, and therefore he answered in a low voice.

"He is your father's guest," he said, "and therefore it ill behoves me to criticise him while he and I are under your father's roof."

The girl made a little grimace.

"You may say what you please for all I care," she asserted, still modulating her speech to the music made by her fingers. "He thinks a great deal of me and would be glad to marry me, but he is not the man for my mind."

Henry Elizabeth glanced at her in surprise at this confidence. The girl was looking steadily at him, and the tune she played must have been very familiar to her, for she continued it without pause or fault while she spoke.

"Indeed," answered the young man, "if I were a maid I should wish for a better mate than he."

"He is well to do," said Maudlin, "and a good estate, but that is little. Also he is rich in great promises," she added mysteriously.

"Why, what can he promise?" Henry Elizabeth asked. "He seems to me no more than an every day country squire."

"He has a standing with the party that serve the Queen of Scots, but I value not his words. If he could make me queen I would not have him. The man I should fancy should be another-guess fellow. He should be a big man and of a brave favour, he should be young and surely strong; if his hair were the colour of sunlight I should be the better pleased, and he should have eyes as blue as the sea."

Now as Maudlin spoke she looked so steadily at Henry Elizabeth that he could not help knowing, though a certain new-found delicacy rebuked him for the knowledge, that it was his own self that she was describing, and that the girl was adventuring as near as might be on a proffer of herself in marriage. Of the two that stood thus facing each other it was the man's face that glowed and burnt with embarrassment. Maudlin, her cheeks of their usual even pink, and her blue eyes steady and unwavering, began to speak again.

"It would not matter a jot of what estate he came, though he should be a gentleman, this husband of mine, for I shall have money enough for the two of us, and for more than two if need be." Here she broke off in her discourse, dropped her eyes to her fingers, and struck two loud chords upon the

keys. "Tell me, Master Braginton," she queried, "do you believe in love at first sight?"

Henry Elizabeth felt that it was time to make an end. The girl's eyes again faced him steadily, and to the young man it seemed as if they now shone green and wide and unwinking like the eyes of a cat.

"Yes," he answered steadily, "I believe in love at first sight, though a week or two ago I should have laughed at your question."

He looked straight out over the girl's head, through the latticed window into the sunshine beyond, and he seemed to see a little group of horsemen and a vision of himself, blustering and straddling, and a slim girl that stood apart, with a fair sad face.

"How mean you?" said Maudlin's voice, and there was a sharp note in it. Henry Elizabeth answered her.

"I met a lady some eighteen or twenty days gone by, the like of whom I had never seen before, and though I spoke with her but twice, I know that I love her and that I shall love her to the last breath I draw. I would serve her and die for her if need be. I will win her if it is to be done under God's will, and if not, then there is no other woman for me in this life."

He turned away as he spoke, for his heart felt big within him. Maudlin laughed a thin little laugh.

"Does she resemble the picture of the Scots Queen that you scanned so closely at dinner," she asked, "or do you always get red and flustered when you see the picture of any sovereign prince?"

"The Scots Queen is a fair lady," answered Henry Elizabeth stoutly, "but she is as the moon to the sun compared to my lady."

The two last words thrilled his heart as he said them. Somehow they seemed to bring himself and the Lady of the Forge closer together, and he repeated them to himself once or twice softly and tenderly. Maudlin looked at him with a sullen expression darkening her fair face, but at this moment the door opened and Master Lillingworth lurched in at it, followed by the sedate form of the goldsmith.

The Highgate squire lost no time in making his way to Maudlin's side, where, bowing somewhat unsteadily, he made

a snatch at her hand and prepared to convey it to his lips. The girl struggled a little, and then surrendered it to his embraces, while she hung her head in an assumption of bashfulness.

"The fairest hand in the kingdom," Master Lillingworth vociferated in what he took to be a tender whisper. "If you would but yield it to me with its enchanting owner, it would soon be one of the mightiest hands in the kingdom as well as being the loveliest."

Henry Elizabeth saw a frown pucker the forehead of his host, but the goldsmith said nothing, and drawing up a chair for the young man to sit on, he niched himself into another and began to talk. He questioned his guest in a kindly fashion as to his plans and future. Did he mean to live in London? Had he ever travelled abroad? Was there any fishing to be had on the Braginton estates? Henry Elizabeth did his best to answer politely and to appear interested, but his attention wandered or rather was forced to the corner of the room where Master Lillingworth pursued his wooing. The Highgate squire's voice, never a soft one, was raised in gusts from time to time, and his words came across the room periodically with startling distinctness. Henry Elizabeth could not help but hear that he was urging Maudlin to look kindly upon his suit the while he promised her in grandiloquent words that she should never have cause to regret doing so. The name of the Queen of Scots was often upon his lips. "This time next year," the West Country man heard him say, "she will be ruling at Whitehall"—and when Maudlin raised her hands in affected horror or surprise—"Nay," he continued, "it is well known that the present sovereign has a malady that will bring her to the grave within the twelvemonth. I had it from a sure source. It is a sickly race. As her brother went, as her sister went, so she will go. She hath a swelling of the legs, strange humours fall upon her lungs, there is an imposthume in her head——" Henry Elizabeth compared this account with the healthy and vigorous figure he had seen mounting a horse outside Dr. Dee's house, and felt reassured. He forced his attention back to his host's conversation and answered him as collectedly as he was able. The last words he heard Master Lillingworth say were in the form of a proverb or adage.

"Remember, mistress," the worthy squire boomed, "that it is better to bask in the light of the rising sun than of the setting sun."

Henry Elizabeth had the odd impression that someone else had said this to the speaker, who now produced it as his own thought. Master Cheltenham, who by certain shifting and shufflings of his legs under his fur gown had betrayed an uneasiness, here rose.

"Maudlin, child," he said, "get you to your needle. No day must pass in idleness."

The girl rose obediently and gave her hand with a pretty grace to Master Lillingworth, who once more pressed his lips to its plump surface. To Henry Elizabeth she dipped a curtsy, on her father she bestowed a kiss, and having finished her devoirs she left the room. Henry Elizabeth felt that it was time for him, too, to make his farewells. He thanked the goldsmith for his hospitality, and on the old man's patently sincere invitation, promised soon to visit him again. But this promise he did not mean to keep. He had a feeling that it would be well for him not to visit the house again until his purpose was accomplished, until he had become a fencer of such a quality that he need not fear to be put to shame nor hurt by any man. There was only one thing he feared, but that he feared greatly: to meet Sir Matthew Favill before he was ready for him. And this as it seemed to him might very well happen if Sir Matthew was an acquaintance of the goldsmith and a friend of Master Lillingworth.

He felt that he was walking in a world where he might at any moment stumble upon plots and counterplots; find himself in depths where he could not swim; in mazes to which he did not hold the thread.

Therefore he took his departure from the goldsmith's house with many sincere expressions of esteem but in a very resolved mood. Master Lillingworth he left behind him in the company of his host, who, it seemed to Henry Elizabeth, looked at his remaining guest with no very great favour.

Smugface let him into the street and into the sunshine, and Henry Elizabeth felt a sense of liberation at the light and the air, after the cool dimness of Master Cheltenham's rooms.

His mind did not run greatly on Maudlin and his conversation with her, but he could not forbear a glance upwards

at her windows. He noted that the shutters were drawn to, but he could have sworn that he saw the glint of gold and colour through the hinge, and he had the feeling that eyes were watching him as he strode away. Therefore he walked the more quickly and never turned his head. For here, very clearly, was another reason for keeping away from Goldsmith's Row.

## CHAPTER XXII

### SETTLING DOWN

**W**HEN Henry Elizabeth found himself alone with Master Gallop again he surprised the jester by some questions that revealed a great simplicity.

"Tell me, good friend," he said, "who is this Queen of Scots that folk talk of and why do they make such a pother about her?"

"My good sir," Gallop replied with as little astonishment in his voice as his courtesy could command, "you speak as if you had come from the moon. This Queen of Scots, this Mary Stuart, is as it were a firebrand that has been flung into this kingdom to our great discomfort and possible undoing."

Henry Elizabeth gaped at him.

"How so?" he asked. "I saw a picture of her this day and she seems a comely creature, more likely to give pleasure than pain to the place of her abiding."

Master Gallop shook his head roguishly.

"There you show yourself a fellow of my own kidney," he said. "Ever taken and swayed by a lovely face. But the trouble is this——" here he paused and looked cautiously round and lowered his voice to a whisper—"there are those in this kingdom who maintain, and that stoutly, that our own dear sovereign Elizabeth is no better than a bastard"—Master Gallop seemed almost to frighten himself by his words, so nervously did he speak them—"and that this daughter of the Stuarts, this widow of a French king and of my Lord Darnley, this bride of Bothwell, is our true and lawful sovereign."

To Henry Elizabeth Master Gallop's string of names meant nothing.

"How may that be in heaven's name?" he asked. Master Gallop, made almost desperate by the young man's portentous ignorance, gazed at him in bewilderment.

"Do you not know," he ejaculated, "that if anything happened to her gracious majesty . . . which heaven defend . . . the Scots Queen would rule these realms as the lawful heir to the crown? Do you not know that her grand-dam was own sister to King Harry of glorious memory?" Here he beckoned to Henry Elizabeth to come closer as one who fears that even walls may have ears. "There be many, but chiefly those of the old faith, who, believing that our Queen was born out of wedlock, seeing that King Harry's first queen, the Spaniard Katherine, was still living when he married Anne Boleyn, and when our Queen was born, hold that the Scots Queen is the true and lawful sovereign of this realm at this present moment. All of which does not serve to make our Queen love Mary Stuart any the more fondly."

"I care nothing for these cranks and fancies. The daughter of King Harry is enough of a Queen for me, and she can count on my allegiance to the end of the journey. Let us say no more on that matter. I seek your aid in my own business."

Master Gallop looked interested. "Any service——" he began, but Henry Elizabeth flowed on unheeding.

"I have reasons of my own for wishing to live very privately in this city of yours till I have served my apprenticeship at Ruffian Hall. Can you commend me to some comfortable lodging where I shall be able to lie smug?"

Master Gallop slipped his hands to his knees and bent his face closer to his guest with an air of great earnestness.

"My young friend," he said, "I will not deny that I have taken a great liking to you. You have seen for yourself that I inhabit a house too large for my simple needs. If you will suffer me to place a pair of rooms at your disposal you will make me very happy. I see but little company, and that chiefly of the opposite sex, and such as visit me shall never be suffered to disturb your privacy."

Henry Elizabeth was touched by the jester's kindness and tempted by the suitability of the offer to his purpose. But he would by no means agree until Master Gallop had consented to name and accept a reasonable sum in payment for his lodging.

All was soon arranged between them, and Henry Elizabeth lost no time in making his way to the Libbard, where he in-



formed the host of his impending departure. The host bore the tidings with philosophy, being by his trade used to partings, and finding consolation in this instance in the fact that his guest left his horse in the Libbard's care. Henry Elizabeth was soon making his way back to Master Gallop's house followed by a youth who bore his portmanteau. He found Master Gallop standing in the door looking anxiously down the road for the return of his future housemate. Henry Elizabeth paid off the porter, swung his pack into the passage of the house, and entered after it himself. Master Gallop followed and closed the door behind him.

And so ended the first chapter of the book of his life in London.

**PART II.**

**THE MASTER OF THE SWORD**



## PART II

### THE MASTER OF THE SWORD

#### CHAPTER I

##### NOVICIATE

**T**HE three months that Henry Elizabeth passed under the roof of Master Gallop sped by with an uncanny swiftness. The day after his installation under the jester's roof he decided to make a further draft upon the sum of money held for him by Master Cheltenham. But he was anxious that no rumour of his new quarters should reach the ears of the goldsmith or the goldsmith's daughter, and so after a consultation with his host, he had written a letter and had it delivered by the hand of a trusted messenger provided by Master Gallop. The messenger soon returned with the money and greetings from the worthy goldsmith; also with accounts of how a young gentlewoman had waylaid him on his homeward journey and asked him in a most winning way for news of Master Braginton, and whether he still abode at the Libbard. To all of which questions the messenger was obliged to answer that he did not know, which was indeed the strictest truth.

Henry Elizabeth, now in possession of ample funds, began a quiet and orderly method of life. He saw few folk familiarly save the little company of players with whom he had made great friends, and those genial ruffians the four Knaves of the Pack. It diverted him much of an afternoon to spend an hour or so in their company at the "Pied Lion" in Hanging-Sword Alley, and to listen to them, over as good wine as any in London, telling tales and tricks of their trade. In a little while of their society he was as learned as themselves in the jargon of their kind and might if he had chosen been enrolled an Upright Man in the brotherhood of the rogues with

Kitchen Mortes at command. Indeed the Knaves, and other friends of theirs, made it plain by their reverent conduct towards him that they would gladly have made him a great lord among them. But Henry Elizabeth, if greatly amused and perhaps also a little flattered, was content to stick fast by his honesty, though he allowed them to pay him their small homage, with the feeling at the back of his head that he might one day have a use for them. The veritable names of the four fellows of Honiton he did not learn, for though they were ready to tell him the most of their histories, they kept that much of it to themselves, and were only known to his as Jack Spade or Jack Heart, Jack Diamond or Jack Club.

But he never allowed his friendships with the Players or with the Knaves to divert him from his devotion to his great purpose, the attainment of a mastery of the sword. Every morning found him at Ruffian Hall, learning his lesson there with a persistence and a patience which, otherwise directed, might have altered the history of England. He was, though he did not heed it, growing famous in the little world of the fencing school. Men remembered Master Polidori's scornful estimate of him on that first memorable meeting, when he had knocked down the Italian for the insolence of his words, and they marvelled to see how he had falsified them. For it began to be said that the West Country man would soon be the equal of Master Polidori himself.

The whole period was one of learning for Henry Elizabeth. The days as they passed were changing and ageing the happy, unhappy young man. Happy in having found his soul, unhappy, perhaps, in having lost his heart. Those days were days of growth and purpose, of energy and struggle. They were days of preparation for the service of his unknown mistress and for the deserving of her commendation whenever he should see her again. He did not doubt for a moment that he should see her again, nor that their lives were to be linked in some fashion. But whenever the happy chance came, be it soon or late, his spirit was set to be in readiness for it.

And meanwhile he learnt things.

He learnt much from my lord of Roehampton, that dazzling youth who had been pleased from the first to accord to Henry Elizabeth an interest which gradually ripened into such a

friendship as might easily have dazzled a fellow less stubborn of purpose, and have extended from Ruffian Hall to Roehampton House if Henry Elizabeth had been willing to spare any of his time for my lord's palace. But if he tactily refused any close intimacy of companionship with the young nobleman, he gained greatly, more unconsciously than consciously, from Lord Roehampton's habit of thought and conversation. The existence of such a man was at first something of a surprise to him. It was more of a surprise to find that there were many such in this new world into which he had flung himself at all adventure.

The brilliant youth and the brilliant youths who resembled him taught the traveller from the west that a man might be a fop in his costume, an exquisite in his carriage, a rhymist of rhymes by inclination, and a scholar by choice, and yet be at the same time not merely something of a statesman, but also a great deal of a soldier. Behind Roehampton's silks and trimmings bulked a body that was inured to fatigue, that was trained to perfection in every order of manly exercise. Under the feather of my lord's cap beat a brain that recognised and respected high ideals, that was ready to command, and was ready, when need were, to obey. It was this quality of person, this union of ease with energy, this alliance of extravagance to-day with austerity to-morrow which touched and troubled Henry Elizabeth and gradually taught him much.

These things he learnt abroad. At home, for so he had come to regard the ex-jester's house, his education was going on, partly with his knowledge and partly without.

Master Gallop's position was a peculiar one. His old calling of fool or jester to the sovereign had given him in some ways an intimacy with the greatest person in the realm enjoyed by no other subject. This tradition had persisted even though his post had been abolished and he no longer had the lugubrious task of trying to make the monarch smile when that august personage was in no jocund mood.

His old position still cast its influence round him in the mind of his mistress, and whenever he chose to make his appearance at court he was pretty sure of a welcome from the Queen of a heartiness that sometimes won him black looks from other courtiers who were less favoured. Strange confidences even would pass between the Queen and her ex-fool,

for Elizabeth, with her keen judgment of men, knew that in telling secrets to Master Gallop she incurred no more danger of those same secrets being spread abroad than if she had confided them to her own ten slender fingers, which she was so fond of admiring and seeing admired.

Something of all this Henry Elizabeth grew to know, and he learnt large lessons from Master Gallop of the great game of life with its pawns and pieces and its intricate rules. He listened with interest to his host's gossip of the court. His native shrewdness enabled him to discriminate clearly between the things which Master Gallop set a price upon and yet which to Henry Elizabeth seemed of no value, and the things upon which Master Gallop set a price which seemed indeed to Henry Elizabeth to be priceless. For the carriage of dapper gentlefolk at court, for the solicitations in the cabinets of great men, for the road to fortune through some pretty lady's favour or some minion's approval, the fellow from Devon had no more than a bucolic disdain. But for those bigger purposes, those deeper breathings of the national life of England of which Master Gallop was every now and then the unwitting spokesman and interpreter, Henry Elizabeth's sturdy intelligence offered a ready soil, and as his knowledge widened so his ambition widened, the ambition to share in the great game that men were playing or were preparing to play in the great world about them. He ripened as it were into the feeling that he was no longer West Country only, that he was one of those who should be ready to stand for England and all that England meant.

And all the time, whether he spoke or hearkened, whether he smiled or kept a grave face, Henry Elizabeth was watching himself, gauging himself, testing himself, to see how far he was advancing upon the road which he had set out to tread. It was his business to fit himself as soon as might be, but no sooner than went with surety of action, to meet with one man and one woman.

So he toiled with delight and took his pleasures with disdain, a dogged persistent fellow, pushing his way, and learning as he went, on his path through those summer weeks.

After an arduous apprenticeship the sourness of his labour-sweat began to sweeten and perfume the air with more Arabian odours. For he grew to be aware, at first

faintly and then firmly, that he was steadily drawing nearer to the goal of his desires.

Indeed the progress that Henry Elizabeth made was more a marvel to master than to pupil. For the first few days, and indeed for the first few weeks, the antics of Henry Elizabeth afforded a kind of fearful fascination to the gentry who honoured Messer Antonio Polidori with their presence. To see a Goliath of a West Country gentleman bounding about with his arms and legs all abroad, and agitating sword and dagger as they were marrow-bone and cleaver, tickled the senses of gentlemen who believed themselves inured to all possibilities of entertainment. Henry Elizabeth struggled, Henry Elizabeth sweated till the drops that oozed from his body did, in the words of a court poet, make a very pool about him, as he plunged and lunged and blundered. Messer Polidori watched him while he taught him, with a dry white smile that was ever the quintessence of politeness.

But Henry Elizabeth progressed. In a little time he jumped less and blundered less, and the pool about his ankles—the pool of the poet—dried up, and the laughter of the gentlemen on the benches against the wall grew fainter and faded into silence, and the dry white smile of Messer Antonio kindled into a more vivid smile of interest. If Dr. Dee had truly carried out his promise and breathed that mysterious spirit into the body of Henry Elizabeth, he could scarcely have hoped for a better result from his experiment. Once Henry Elizabeth began to climb the mountain of success he climbed with a vengeance. His physical strength, his determination, and his obstinacy combined to guide him to his goal. The intricacies and difficulties of all the forms of fence soon ceased to be intricacies and difficulties for him. After a time the gentlemen spectators came to admire, to applaud, to learn. After a time the surprised smile of Messer Antonio shifted to a look of settled resignation.

At last the end came of a sultry summer afternoon. The few fencers who had resolved to continue their exercise in spite of the intense heat had taken their departure. Henry Elizabeth, who suffered neither heat nor cold to temper his ardour for his self-imposed task, would have followed their example, but Messer Polidori made him a slight gesture, which he interpreted rightly into a signal to remain.



When master and pupil were together alone in the great hall, Messer Antonio advanced towards Henry Elizabeth with extended hands, and his dark face shone with an altogether kindly smile.

"My friend," he cried, "my comrade, my colleague, my peer! I salute you! You have done more than you bargained for. You have conquered Antonio Polidori."

Henry Elizabeth gaped in no small amazement at the flashing Italian. Had he not know him to be incarnate sobriety, he would have judged him to be drunk. He sought to speak, but before he had time to stutter a syllable, the swordsman renewed his discourse.

"On that day when you first came here we quarrelled, you and I, though we seemed to make it up and call friends. But I had no friendly mind, I promise you."

Henry Elizabeth stared at him.

"Wherefore not?" he asked. "You shook hands on the matter as if all were well."

"Maybe I did," said the Italian with a wry smile, "but I tell you frankly that if my face smiled, I bore you in my heart so bitter a grudge that nothing would content me but the taking of your life."

He made this villainous confession with such a cheer and calm as staggered his hearer. But the fencing-master, taking no notice of the patent astonishment of his pupil, continued his speech.

"It was my intention to teach you a little of my immortal art, a very little as I reckoned, for I did not dream that you could get beyond the letters 'B' and 'C' in its primer. Then when you had gained so much, or rather so little, skill as to make you vain-glorious, it was my intent to despatch you in a bout at loose play."

"But that," Henry Elizabeth protested, "would have been no other than mere murder, and for murder I take it there stand a gallows or so in England."

The Italian laughed amiably in his face.

"I am sufficiently familiar with your droll English customs to make no mistake. It would be an accident, the jest of chance. My foot would slip and in falling my sword would transfix your body. Or you yourself might stumble over some smeared spot on the floor and spit yourself like a trussed

capon. Be assured there are plenty of ways of providing for a pleasant mishap in a school like mine with which no one could find fault."

The fencing-master spoke with such perfect nonchalance of his flagitious intentions that Henry Elizabeth's sturdy rustic sense of humour compelled him to accept his utterances in the spirit in which they were spoken.

"Then why," he asked, "did you deny yourself the entertainment that you seem to have planned so carefully?"

Antonio Polidori shrugged his shoulders, made an apologetic motion with his fingers and an apologetic grimace with his face.

"The conscience of the artist," he explained, "was stronger than the malice of the man. When I saw how you moved from point to point of my immortal art, growing daily, hourly, more admirable in its practice, I said to myself, 'Here is a man whom Antonio must respect, here is a man whom Antonio must love.'"

Henry Elizabeth felt a decided satisfaction at the change of sentiment of the Italian, which, however, he did not feel called upon to put into words. So he said nothing, and indeed the Italian did not seem to think that there was anything to be said about his discreditable intentions. Having made his confession with what Henry Elizabeth considered astonishing effrontery, and with what he himself seemed to regard as an affable candour, Antonio Polidori turned a glowing glance of satisfaction upon his pupil.

"You may have heard," he said, "of secret thrusts and counters, the knowledge of which is jealously guarded by those that command them, and imparted only to others at a heavy price. Now in a sense I maintain that there be no such things as secret thrusts and counters, for no man who is a true master of the sword can be taken unawares by any such masking fancies. Yet there be indeed certain passages of sword-play which are only known by the elect and only practisable by the elect. I know of such an one, and because you are my equal and my friend I propose to communicate it to you."

Therewith he was pleased to illustrate a certain cunning feint which would naturally lead an adversary to expect a certain manner of attack. But it was the pith of Polidori's trick that the attack which really followed was very different

from the assault which the opponent had been led to expect, and this attack was swift and brisk, and if brilliantly executed might confidently be relied upon to end an encounter in favour of the combatant that used it.

Henry Elizabeth thanked the Italian cordially, fixed the lesson in a memory that had learned to be tenacious, and said farewell to Ruffian Hall.

## CHAPTER II

### NOSTRADAMUS THE SECOND

**W**HEN Henry Elizabeth, boiling with big thoughts, arrived at his lodging he found Master Gallop awaiting his return with a very grave expression of countenance. It was plain to the young man that the jester had some heavy matter upon his mind.

"You come in good time," said Master Gallop as he rose to greet his friend. "Here I have been sitting, drinking and thinking, thinking and drinking, this hour and more, and wondering what had become of you."

Henry Elizabeth explained briefly that he had been detained by the Italian, and having said thus much he asked the jester why he seemed so troubled.

"I wish to God," said Master Gallop irritably, and not returning a direct answer to the question of his companion, "that her majesty the Queen were a more manageable woman."

"She would not be so good a queen if she were," Henry Elizabeth commented.

"She is a great trouble to her ministers," retorted Gallop, "and would be a great trouble to me if I were still her stipendiary jester."

"She seems to be a great trouble to you all the same," Henry Elizabeth observed. Gallop scratched his head with an air of vexation.

"You are in the right of it," he said. "I cannot help myself. I have a liking for the woman, and when I find her making a fool of herself about French sorcerers and the like I tell you fairly it sours my liver."

"About French sorcerers?" Henry Elizabeth queried. He did not follow the drift of Master Gallop's speech.

"You have surely heard," said the jester with a vexed

emphasis, "of this Parisian wizard of whom all the town is talking? He who can tell fortunes and cast nativities and read the future and brew simples for the conserving of youth, better than any man in Christendom, not excepting Dr. Dee himself."

Henry Elizabeth had a dim recollection of having heard Lord Roehampton speak with some of his gay companions about some foreign astrologer, but he had paid the matter little heed. At Ruffian Hall he ate and drank swordsmanship, and if he had a moment to spare he devoted it to the lesson that was past or the lesson yet to come. Wherefore he carried himself truthfully enough in shaking his head. Master Gallop emitted a sound that was half groan, half snort.

"What is the good of living in London," he growled, "if one knows nothing of what is going on in London?"

Henry Elizabeth saw that the elder man was really worried. "If you will enlighten me I shall be the better informed," he said good-humouredly.

"Have you to know," said the ex-jester, "that about a month ago there arrived in London a certain French philosopher who calls himself Nostradamus the Second. He entered unheralded, very discreetly. He glided, as I might say, into the city and set in his staff there as if he were no more than an ordinary mortal. Yet though I cannot tell how it came about, in a little while his fame was upon everybody's lips. He has taken a fine house on the river bank Chelsea way, and I think every soul in London would visit him if he did but suffer it. But he makes it such a favour to receive visitors and charges such a price for the privilege and makes such rules as to seeing not more than two persons together that you might think that he was the Pope or the Sophy."

Henry Elizabeth listened with some indifference to Master Gallop's narrative. He had himself no inclination to visit another wizard, and he could not understand why the Frenchman's presence should vex his friend. He said as much.

"Why," said Master Gallop, "it seems that his Grace of Norfolk has visited the sorcerer, who has with him a woman young and beautiful that claims to be a thousand years old and can read the future like kiss-my-hand, and he said so much to her majesty of the marvel, that the Queen is all agog

to visit the magician alone, or attended only by one servant. Now I have no great love for my Lord of Norfolk, nor do I trust him overmuch, and I hold it unwise for her majesty to gad about here and there at all adventure in times like these, when Spanish knives and Scottish dirks are ready to be busy. But when I said as much to the Queen's grace my arguments did but whet her appetite; and what do you think she has it in her head to do now?"

Henry Elizabeth shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, she proposes—and I believe the suggestion came from the duke—to visit this necromancer dressed in the habit of a page."

Master Gallop looked so serious that Henry Elizabeth suppressed the smile that rose to his lips. The jester continued.

"I besought her majesty to remember how precious was her safety to her subject and to the realm, and also that no one knows what this man may be, or what his intentions. She declared she was afraid of no star-gazer, and that she would go to him in manly disguise to prove him, whether he could guess the hoax, or if not, what fortune he would foretell to the pretended page."

Henry Elizabeth whistled softly. He began to understand the jester's anxiety.

"I will be no party," Master Gallop went on, "to any project in which I am not assured of the absolute safety of her majesty, and so I told her, thereby drawing down on myself a good sound rating from her grace. She was set on going, and all the more so since the duke had not failed to fill her head with ideas of the enchanting figure she would cut in the page's costume. You must know," continued Gallop, drawing nearer to Henry Elizabeth and speaking in a mysterious way, "that her majesty is vain to excess of her legs; while I happen to know that they are no such great matter, being indeed no better than broomsticks. But on this subject see to it that you be mum for ever, or it may go uneasily with you. Be that as it may, she is set upon this masquerading fancy, and the one thing that remains to me is to see that she comes out of the adventure in all safety. I therefore besought her to allow me to provide the one companion whom she would consent to take with her, and promised her that it should be such an one as should be discreet, loyal, and trustworthy."

Having reached this point in his narrative, Master Gallop fixed his gaze upon Henry Elizabeth.

"It was here," he said, "that you came into my head. You are devoted to her majesty, you are strong as Samson, you are not known at court. In your company her majesty might embark upon her enterprise with every security that her disguise would never be guessed at. Wherefore I made bold to lay your name before her majesty."

"You did not wait for my consent," the young man said with a smile.

"My friend," the jester replied, "I know you and I knew that I might count upon you in such a strait. Maybe I said a word or two as to your outward looks, for there is nothing in the world that the Queen loves so well as a fine figure of a man. Be that as it may, the front and the back of the matter is that you are to proceed to the Queen's palace to-morrow when you will on delivery of your name have audience with her majesty."

The jester looked anxiously at his companion, who slowly nodded his head in sign of consent, but he did not speak for a few minutes. He had come to London to seek adventure, and here was adventure crowding upon him. To-morrow he was to have audience of the Queen, but the thought did not daunt him. She was a woman, like any other, only a little cleverer and a little more spoiled than some. Therefore he whistled softly, and nodded his approval of the jester's plan.

## CHAPTER III

### A VISIT TO COURT

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH, in spite of his repeated self-assurance that he feared no man and therefore no woman—a deduction woefully illogical—found that his pulses were drumming with unwonted lustiness as he made his way towards the palace of the Queen. Again and again he assured himself on his journey that there was nothing to trouble him, that a Queen, when all was said and done, was no more than an every-day woman in a richer gown, and that he could flatter himself with a sufficient knowledge of woman-kind to carry himself valiantly in conversation with any possible she. But in spite of all these buckings and thumpings, the fact remained that he was conscious of a kind of trepidation which increased in a disagreeable ratio with the approaching proximity of the royal dwelling. If he had not been as obstinate a dog as ever defied a trainer, there were moments on that peregrination when Henry Elizabeth might have yielded to the sore temptation to turn right about face, take to his heels and run. But his native obstinacy stiffened him, and there were no signs of hesitation on face or in carriage when he came to a halt before the palace.

He found no difficulty in gaining admission to the precincts of the royal residence when once he had stated to those that guarded the gate that he was promised an audience of the Queen that afternoon. Access to a royal palace was not made difficult in that radiant reign to the Queen's loving subjects, and the warders were well aware that if the visitor had in any wise over-rated his pretensions to entry, he would be promptly challenged by one who was a very important personage in the royal household.

This was Master Bowyer, the Queen's Black Rod in Waiting, who mounted guard before her presence-chamber and



carried in his precise memory the list of those that the sovereign had expressed her willingness to receive. Much was entrusted to his discretion, and no man knew better than this seasoned servant how to combine the service of his mistress with the dignity of his office or to decide with tact some unexpected question of precedence. When Henry Elizabeth entered the great ante-chamber Master Bowyer was pointed out to him, a stately ceremonious figure gravely habited in black.

The day upon which Henry Elizabeth first spoke to his sovereign would inevitably have been a memorable one in his life, but it was destined to be memorable also in another respect through an incident in which he was a participant, an incident which impressed upon his shrewd intelligence the vicissitudes of a court.

He made his way across the open space which separated the entrance where the courtiers congregated and those that hoped for audience lingered, with an air and carriage which he took to be befitting the Master of Braginton. Bowyer, leaning upon his Black Rod, listened to Henry Elizabeth's statement very courteously. He referred to a written paper that he carried in his pocket, and finding there Henry Elizabeth's name and hour of appointment he gave him a grave salutation.

"Her majesty is alone at this moment," he said, "and my instructions are that she will receive you."

As he spoke he signed to the pages at the doors, and these in obedience to the signal opened them to admit the favoured comer. Henry Elizabeth was about to pass through when a gentleman who had newly arrived in the company of another, pushed forward, and catching Henry Elizabeth by the arm, drew him, thus taken unawares, a pace or so aside and made to enter the presence in his stead. Henry Elizabeth clenched his fist, but any rash action that he might have taken was forestalled by the Gentleman of the Black Rod who before the young man had time to realise clearly what was happening, barred the intruder's way and denied him entry.

"By your favour, my lord of Leicester," he said politely, but with a very resolute firmness, and pointing to Henry Elizabeth with his wand, "this gentleman has immediate audience of her majesty."

At the mention of the gentleman's name Henry Elizabeth looked at him with great curiosity. His companionship with Master Gallop had taught him most of the court gossip, and in its chronicles no one figure repeatedly and with such good fortune as the man who now stood before him. Master Gallop did not hesitate, behind a raised hand, to bestow him as a lover upon the Queen, and whether or no, he was patently the most favoured of all the gentlemen at her court, it seeming as if Elizabeth could deny him nothing. Therefore Henry Elizabeth took good stock of the person whom the great Queen delighted to honour, and saw before him a handsome man of some thirty-five years, with a chestnut beard, a straight nose, and eyes that had a shifty look for all their fine shape and colour. He was habited in the height of the fashion and with much magnificance, and carried in his hands a pair of scented leather gloves which perfumed the air around him. This fine gentleman gave Master Bowyer a great stare and vented a great laugh.

"By your favour," he mimicked mockingly, "I come on my own business, which I think goes before all other."

As he spoke he made to enter the room again, and again the Gentleman of the Black Rod opposed him. At this point Henry Elizabeth, uncertain how the contest might end, and thinking that with such a rival as the Earl of Leicester he stood a very good chance of losing his audience altogether unless he acted promptly, slipped swiftly through the opening of the doors before the pages, who were at a loss how to act, could prevent him. Even as he did so he heard his would-be supplanter blustering noisily and threatening the Gentleman of the Black Rod.

"You shall be discharged, fellow," Henry Elizabeth heard him shout, "as I live I promise you, you shall be discharged." Meanwhile the doors had been closed, and Henry Elizabeth was in the presence chamber of his sovereign.

For all his self-confidence Henry Elizabeth was conscious of an unfamiliar diffidence and an unwelcome embarrassment. He found himself in a large room whose walls were hung with tapestry representing episodes in the history of Diana and her nymphs. There was a table covered with books and papers at the far end of the room, and by this table sat a woman blazing like an idol in a gown of cloth of gold that was so

studded with precious stones as to make the spectator wink. She held a book in her left hand on which she had been reading or affecting to read, but it now lay disregarded in her lap though her thumb still held divided the pages at which she had been looking when her study was interrupted. It seemed again to Henry Elizabeth, staring at her, that she carried a terrible comeliness that would never be to his taste, though it was not beyond his imagination to believe that other men might be enamoured or feign to be enamoured of her. Her face was ruddled with paint, which was at the moment a superfluity, for her majesty's natural skin was now so red with anger that the aid of art was wasted. The noise of the unfamiliar brawling had come to her ears, and had moved her to a passion of vexation. She stared at Henry Elizabeth with her beady black eyes, but before he could explain himself, the doors were of a sudden flung open and the Gentleman of the Black Rod hurried into the room and cast himself at her feet.

"How now, Master Bowyer," said the Queen, "what does this mean and what is the hubbub beyond?"

"By your majesty's favour," answered Black Rod, "I do but seek to know whether my lord of Leicester is King here, or your majesty Queen?"

Even while he spoke the doors were again parted, and the splendid gentleman, with an irate expression of countenance, strode into the room.

While the Queen looked with surprise and displeasure on the two intruders on her ordered state, Henry Elizabeth felt that his own situation was awkward enough. He knew that he was witnessing all unwillingly one of those court episodes which it were better for those of the outer world not to witness. However, as he noticed that no one was now taking the smallest heed of him, he took advantage of his unimportance to glide behind a great screen which stood near the door and thereby to edge his way along the wall to a windowed recess, where he hoped to shelter unseen until the business which he did not understand had fumed itself out. But for all that he was hidden, he could not help hearing what went on in the Queen's chamber. He heard Leicester's voice high and hot, and confident as only a monarch's favourite may be, in denunciation of the insolence of Bowyer. He heard Bowyer reply with a clear and quiet account of what had happened, to

which the Queen listened with an irritation which manifested itself by the tapping of her shoe against the floor. She then turned, as Henry Elizabeth guessed, towards my lord of Leicester, and the tone of her voice was scarcely charged with amiability.

"God's death, my lord," the young man heard her cry, "I have wished you well, but my favour is not so locked up in you that others shall not participate thereof, for I have many servants to whom I have and will, at my pleasure, confer my favour, and likewise re-assume the same. And if you think to rule here I will take a course to see you forthcoming. I will have but one mistress and no master. As for this, my faithful servant and true friend, Master Bowyer, look that no ill happen to him lest it be severely required at your hands."

Stern as was the tenor of the Queen's speech, it was rendered still more stern by the vehemence with which it was delivered and the indignation with which it was charged. Leicester was so taken aback by this unexpected outburst that he lost all his presence of mind. He stammered some almost incoherent words of apology and regret, craved permission to withdraw, which was promptly and curtly accorded, and backed out of the room in a very different mood from that in which he had entered it.

When the earl was gone, Elizabeth turned to Bowyer and spoke a few words in a very kind tone but in too low a voice for Henry Elizabeth to hear what was said. As the usher was about to withdraw Elizabeth demanded of him what had become of the young man to whom she had promised audience, a question which caused that same young man to draw himself still further into the window niche in which he was concealed.

"He is doubtless in the antechamber," replied Bowyer. "I will go seek him." And with that he quitted the room.

Henry Elizabeth, peering from his hiding-place, saw that the Queen had leaned back in her chair and had covered her face with her hands. It seemed to him that he might by the help of this circumstance take the opportunity to escape from his very unenviable position. He made his way cautiously from the window and crept noiselessly along the wall, holding his breath anxiously and fearfully scanning the unconscious Queen. He had reached the doors and touched a handle, but

before he could turn it the Queen suddenly drew her hands from her face and looked straight at him.

"God's death, fellow," she cried, "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

In face of the anger he had hoped to escape, Henry Elizabeth recovered his equanimity.

"May it please your majesty," he replied with a bow, "I am here in obedience to your majesty's gracious grant of an audience."

The angry surprise that had darkened the Queen's countenance suddenly changed to a look of amused recognition.

"I have seen you before," she cried. "I mind you now. You are the good giant that carried an old man on his shoulder that he might behold us at ease. A kindly courtesy which youth is not always too ready to pay to age."

Henry Elizabeth bowed anew in grateful recognition of the Queen's approval. But again the Queen's expression changed.

"How is it," she questioned, "that you stand here? Master Bowyer told me that you had returned to the antechamber."

"As to that," Henry Elizabeth said, "your gentleman with the black quarter-staff in his fist told me to enter, so I entered."

Elizabeth hunched her cheek upon her closed fingers and looked steadfastly at the young man.

"How long have you been in this chamber?" she asked suddenly.

"Some few minutes," Henry Elizabeth answered tranquilly. "I had scarcely entered when another followed upon my heels who seemed from his carriage to hold himself of more importance than I, so in my modesty I gave way."

"How do you mean that you gave way," questioned the Queen sharply. "What did you do when this person of importance came into my presence?"

Henry Elizabeth pointed gravely to the recess of the window.

"I stationed myself yonder," he said with an air of great simplicity, "and entertained myself with the contemplation of your majesty's rose-garden."

The Queen frowned a little.

"You were scarcely out of ear-shot," she said in a low

voice. "Pray you tell me what you overheard when you were housed in yonder shelter."

"Your majesty," said Henry Elizabeth in a firm voice, "as the conversation was not directed towards my ears, I was at the pains to be sure my ears should not accept it. So I made bold to open a window and take the fresh air."

"You are a youth of great discretion somewhat beyond your years," said the Queen with an irony in her approbation that Henry Elizabeth took it upon him to ignore, "but if you had heard all that passed it would have mattered little. I said nothing that I would not have said in the presence of any Englishman or of every Englishman now living. But I marvel how you knew that our conference was ended."

She smiled slyly as she spoke, and Henry Elizabeth knew that she was congratulating herself at having caught him out. But he was ready for her.

"Your majesty," he said, "although my head was poked out of window and could not tell one word from another, I was not so hard of hearing but that I could know when there were no words spoken to hear."

Elizabeth looked at the youth with a new approval in her glance.

"You have a certain shrewdness," she said, "which is not a little to my liking. Truly you have won your audience, which if you had been a less resolute fellow you would have come mighty near to losing. Well, since you are here, tell me quickly and by all means shortly what you want to say to me."

"My business is very simple," responded Henry Elizabeth, "and can be answered in"—he broke off to count upon his fingers, and then resumed—"in six words. I wish to serve your majesty."

"That," said the Queen drily, "is a good wish, but not, I thank God, a rare or a strange wish. There be many thousands of my stout subjects that are moved by no less a purpose. How do you propose to serve me, Master Braginton?"

"Your majesty," said Henry Elizabeth earnestly, "it would seem that I was appointed by destiny to serve you, seeing that I have the honour to be your namesake."

The Queen looked at him sharply.

"How so, young gentleman. Are you not a Braginton? How can you claim to be Tudor?"

"I claim no such honour," said Henry Elizabeth. "My surname is Braginton sure enough, but I carry two noble names, and the first of them is Henry, which is the name of your gracious father, and the second is Elizabeth, which is the name of your gracious self."

"How come you to carry a woman's name?" asked the Queen in surprise.

"Before I was born," said the young man, "my mother expected to bear a girl and had made up her mind to name her Elizabeth after your majesty out of love to the lady your mother. But I came into the world as I am, and my father was for naming me Henry after your royal sire. But my mother stuck to her purpose and had her way, because of some dream she had; and so if you are Elizabeth I am Elizabeth too, and by the same token we both have hair that is much of a colour."

Elizabeth smiled a little at the assurance of the youth.

"I cannot mind that I have ever heard of a male Elizabeth before this hour," she commented.

"There is an Elizabeth in England," said Henry Elizabeth stoutly, "that carries the heart of a strong man in the body of a beautiful woman. I am proud to have been so blessed as to bear her name for my better encouragement."

He was not speaking the strictest truth, but he remembered that he was at court, and he remembered Master Gallop's hints, and he spoke as hotly as if his heart were as red as his hair, and chuckled inwardly to see what a courtier he was becoming.

"You have got a tongue in your head," said the Queen approvingly, "and there is a mother-wit under your red hair which knows how to direct it. But I doubt me you do not know yet, my dear name-fellow, how it is that you are to do me service."

Henry Elizabeth flushed with pride at the graciousness of his sovereign.

"One service is as good as another to me," he averred, "so long as it be for your majesty's sake, and so long as I believe it to be to your majesty's advantage."

The Queen gazed with approval upon this cub from Devonshire who growled so lustily. She was used to eloquent phrases, but this sturdy West Country man spoke as if he meant what

he said with every drop of his blood and every bone of his body. She nursed her chin on her hand and regarded her latest champion astutely.

"You speak like a sphinx," she said, "with a riddling twist in your tongue. You are all for my service, but with a proviso which I do not like, seeing that it is I who settle when and where service is to my advantage."

"Your majesty," Henry Elizabeth answered frankly, "I am a plain fellow who loves your majesty dearly, but who loves also to speak his mind. I know something of a purpose which your majesty has in view, and to be honest I do not like it."

"How now," cried the Queen with a flush and a frown, "you are very free when you air your likings and dislikings of my intentions. How much of my design has Master Gallop made you acquainted with?"

Henry Elizabeth recounted simply and directly all that Master Gallop had told him.

"And what," asked the Queen, "is your wisdom pleased to dislike in this business? Is it that you consider it unbecoming of me that am a maid to slip my body into male attire for an evening's entertainment?"

Henry Elizabeth shook his head.

"In whatever attire your majesty were pleased to array yourself," he said, more or less answering the simper with which Elizabeth chose to accompany her last words, "such habit would seem the most admirable. It is for another reason that I make bold to challenge your majesty's proposed action."

"And pray what may that be?" Elizabeth asked with more good humour than those who knew her best would have believed possible when any cross was offered to her will. But Elizabeth was greatly taken with her namesake, and found herself ready to play the gracious lady.

"By your leave," said Henry Elizabeth, "I would have your majesty carry yourself warily in this business. Wherefore, under your royal favour, I have certain proposals to make in the hope of their gaining your approval."

The Queen gave him a drolling glance that was more than half a compliment.

"You have our full and free leave to say your say," she declared, settling herself in her chair with an air of amiable attention. Thus encouraged, Henry Elizabeth began to speak,



but what he spoke was said in so low a voice that the Muse of History, eavesdropping at the door, failed to catch so much as a whisper or syllable of his matter.

When he had made an end the Queen nodded her head approvingly, and extended him her jewelled fingers to salute.

As Henry Elizabeth passed out of the presence he ran against Bowyer, who greeted him with a smile.

"You are in favour, Master Braginton," he said. "You have gained a longer audience than her majesty has been pleased to grant for this many a day. I foresee the time coming when I shall be glad to beseech your good word."

"I am neither a courtier nor a politician," Henry Elizabeth answered. "I love neither great houses nor great cities, and I hunger and thirst for the countryside. But it is worth while to stifle in London for the sake of a word with the Queen's majesty."

On that speech Henry Elizabeth quitted the palace, and as if moved by a mischievous spirit of contrast made his way to the city. There he visited in turn two taverns. At the first, the "Triton," a hostelry much affected by the player folk, he sought and found Master Buttonshaw and had some earnest speech with him over a flagon of Burgundy, which the actor was pleased to call giant's blood because of its redness and its strength. Thereafter he hied him to the "Pied Lion" in Hanging-Sword Alley and held a conference with the four Knaves.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HOUSE BY THE WATERSIDE

**O**N a certain later day a boat was being rowed from the city up stream by a pair of lusty arms. The arms needed to be lusty, for the boat contained three passengers to the single waterman, and one of those passengers might easily be estimated to rate as two ordinary citizens. This individual was rather a citizeness, whose bulk was enhanced by the voluminous splendour of her apparel. Her ruff was magnificent, her stomacher was splendid, and it would have been difficult for anyone but an experienced tailor to guess at the number of petticoats contained beneath the amplitude of a farthingale whose gorgeous material and vast dimensions might well have threatened to swamp the wherry. By this citizeness' side was seated a slim creature in a page's habit, whose features, like those of the citizeness, were shielded from any curious gaze by the defence of a black vizard. This page was so rounded of person and swaying of carriage as to give the impression that the male garments covered a female body.

Behind this pair sat an ordinary serving man simply clad and accoutred, as was the custom for serving men, with a sword and buckler.

The wherry pursued its course until it came within the neighbourhood of Chelsey, when the oarsman directed it towards the walled garden of a handsome mansion on the left hand of the bank. The coming of the party seemed to have been expected, for no sooner had the vessel nosed the landing-stage, than a door in the wall opened and a man appeared furnished with a boat-hook, by whose aid the vessel was kept close to the shore while its occupants effected a landing. The stout lady got out with some awkwardness of gait, and shook her vast plumage on alighting like a gigantic turkey-hen.

She stooped not a little, and waddled a great deal, presumably from either age or infirmity, and supported her careful steps with the aid of a stout stick of ebony wood. The good woman was nimbly followed by the slim personage in the page's habit. The boatman made fast to the wharf with a rope through a ring, and the fellow with the sword and buckler remained stolidly in his seat.

The stout lady muttered some words to the servant of the house, who bowed respectfully, made assurance that the visitors were waited for, and straightway proceeded to guide them across a handsome garden, stocked with all manner of strange herbs and trees and flowers, to the river door of the mansion. There he transferred the guests to the care of a grave major-domo.

To this dignified personage the stout lady addressed herself immediately, instead of waiting to let the page play herald. This unceremonious act appeared to cause no surprise to the major-domo, who indeed took in the best possible part the flashing winks with which the stout lady emphasised, in hurried whispers, his duty to be more than ordinary civil to the young gentleman. The young gentleman himself stood carelessly aloof while this significant by-play was toward, and it was with an air of great dignity that he motioned to his companion to take the lead when the major-domo, with many respectful salutations, requested the visitors to follow him.

The major-domo led the way into a stately hall, from which arose a massive staircase of oak, at the foot of which two braziers stood in which pungent aromatic woods were burning with many-coloured flames. From the moment that the major-domo had reached these braziers, his manner assumed a sacerdotal air, as if he had passed from the profane cold of the outer world into the sacred warmth of an ancient temple, and he turned and set his forefinger to his lips ere he began to conduct the visitors up the stairs.

When the pair had been ushered into the presence-chamber of the sage, they found themselves in a great room furnished with exceeding splendour. The walls were curtained with hangings of azure silk, which served to present a map of all the heavenly bodies embroidered in gold. Beneath their feet extended a carpet, cunningly woven, upon which the several countries of the earth were depicted, in their due proportion,

and each in their proper places according to the projection of Gerardus Mercator. At each side of the room, where the circumambient waters of the globe, as wöven in the carpet, were very lively populated with presentations of fishes, mer-men, mermaids and other sea-creatures, a large couch was stationed. In the middle of the room rose a mighty table of carved oak, whose massive legs were composed of four kneeling figures, all differing in form, that were supposed to represent the four winds. A vast chair stood behind this table. The room was illuminated by a lamp suspended from the ceiling, which flooded the room with a pale light of a livid hue strange and even startling to the visitors.

He that introduced them to this strange apartment motioned them, with a grave civility, towards a couch hard by the end of the room, where the curtained windows gave upon the river. The seeming page, with an almost ostentatious indifference to his status, took a seat upon the couch and motioned to his companion to do the like. Thereupon the usher took his leave with a solemn salutation, and the pair were left alone for a few moments, to silent contemplation of their strange surroundings. Their loneliness, however, did not unduly persevere. After a very few minutes the starry curtains behind the windborne table parted, and through the aperture a figure entered the room, who by his carriage and his costume alike, easily asserted himself as the master-spirit of the House of Wisdom.

The sage saluted his visitors with a wide extension of the arms and a grave inclination of the head. He was habited in a white gown, like a monastic robe, with a huge hood, that was so drawn forward over his face as almost wholly to conceal his features. As the figure stood there rigid, his attitude was so statue-like, and the folds of his gown showed so sculptural, that he might well have passed for an image instead of a being. For a pause of some seconds he stood silent; then he suddenly questioned:

"What do ye seek in the House of Wisdom?"

The voice was weighted by a foreign accent that was marked even to extravagance. This was scarcely surprising, as the philosopher was given out to be a Frenchman; but it seemed, for some reason or other, to surprise the ample lady, who watched the sage intently through her vizard. The slim page

took it upon himself to answer the question in a low and carefully-controlled voice.

"We seek knowledge of the Elixir of Life."

The white form bent its cowed head, as if it had expected some such answer, but remained silent.

"I have heard that you command such an elixir. Have I been told the truth?"

"I possess," replied the sage, in the same strongly accented tone as before, "the secret of a certain cordial, which does indeed contain many precious qualities, but I do not call it the Elixir of Life. I call it rather the Elixir of Youth."

"Why do you draw the distinction?" the page asked. "What is the property of your cordial?"

"It has the power," the sage replied, "of conserving him or her who partakes of its grace, in the age the man or woman commands at the time when the prescribed draught is consumed, for a term of some ten years."

"For no longer a time?" said the page in a voice of disappointment. "I had believed more wonders of your brewage."

"The draught can be renewed," said the sage, gravely, "at the expiration of the time, by whosoever may wish to renew it."

"If that be so," said the page, "then surely your cordial may well be called the Elixir of Life, seeing that it promises renewal after renewal, and thereby immortality?"

The sage shook his head.

"You ask more of our balsam than we, who hold its secrets, have ever demanded for it. The Elixir of Youth cannot defend its user from disease or violence, or the calamities of nature. It can renew the body from one definite period to another definite period. But it will not make the body invulnerable."

"There is always the heel of Achilles," said the page, with a sigh. "But none the less the efficiency of your balsam appears to be great, if all you say of it is true."

"I have nothing to gain," said the sage, with the slightest shrug of his shoulders, "by the virtues of the elixir. I do not shriek its benefits into the ears of mankind. I do not thrust its precious essences into the hand of the indifferent. You yourself, for instance, who make bold to question me, I did not summon you hither to hear me speak of its qualities. You came of your own accord, spurred by the idle curiosity of strangers at a fair."

The tone of dignity and reproof which the sage was pleased to assume had something of an effect upon his questioner, who kept silence for a little space, as if thinking deeply upon his words.

"What you say is very wary and discreet," the page said suddenly, "but you must surely admit that when you speak of a marvel you should be ready to offer some proof of the truth of what you say."

"I do not admit that I speak of a marvel," said the sage, with unchangeable composure, "for this elixir does no more than fulfil the dream of many a wise man since the dawn of time. It has been the frequent belief of learned leeches that the daily decay of the animal man can be arrested by the use of the right elements and properties; that the human body can be built up afresh and its various humours strengthened and inspirited by the timely administration of certain subtle distillations. I do not assert, though I believe as much, that these distillations will for ever maintain the full power of their efficacy. It may be that with the lapse of many years, of many centuries, the force of the elixir may wane, since nothing we know of, that is mortal, endures for ever on this earth. But of that we have as yet no means of judging."

"God's death, you speak with a riddling tongue," said the page, impatiently. "Either you can renew youth, which is life, or you cannot. If you can renew youth indefinitely, you have practically compassed immortality. But how can you prove to me that you have done so much?"

"There is no reason," said the sage, "why I should feel called upon to offer you any proof in the matter." He spoke with a quiet dignity that was perfectly courteous, but also perfectly firm. "I have not entreated you to come here and share such poor secrets as I may happen to command. I ask no one's favour; I woo no one's patronage. While I will never close my doors against any seeker after truth, I must remind such seekers that they come of their own accord, unsolicited albeit not unwelcome. But they must also remember that they come to request, not to demand, and that while I am willing, I am not compelled, to speak of the things that are dear to me."

The listener accepted the graciously delivered rebuke with a slight inclination of the head.

"You are in the right, and I am in the wrong. But I do seek after truth and seek eagerly. Will you so far favour me, a stranger, as to afford me some proof of the wonder you speak of?"

"I can afford you no other and no better proof," replied the sage, "than the evidence which has convinced my reason of a thing that might well, in itself, appear unreasonable. I have at hand one that is the living witness of the power of the elixir. But before I produce this most fortunate of existing creatures, I must first be assured that you are indeed worthy of such a revelation."

As he spoke he turned to the table, by the side of which he had been standing, and picked from its surface a pair of crystal globes, of about the size of a small orange, and advancing towards his visitors, placed one in each of their right hands. Then, returning to the table, he took a third crystal into his own keeping, and, gazing on it fixedly, commanded his visitors to do the like. This they did, in a heavy silence that endured for some couple of minutes; a silence that was broken by the sage, who abruptly asked his visitors if either of them had seen anything in the glassy sphere they contemplated.

The ample lady shook her head emphatically. The page did the like, with a sigh, and the four words, "I have seen nothing."

The sage seemed to be gratified by the response to his interrogatory.

"Your answers," he declared, "have proved to me that you do indeed come here, as you say you come, in the honest and sober pursuit of truth. By virtue of that same honesty of mind, you saw nothing; wherefore, you are now worthy to see something, the like of which few men or women have seen in this generation."

He laid his crystal on the table, and quietly resumed possession of the two spheres which he had allotted to his guests. He then turned to a basin on a bronze tripod that stood hard by him, presenting the figures of three youthful women, naked save for the girdles about their middles, which carried in Greek letters the names of the three Graces. The sage blew upon the basin, and immediately a fierce green flame sprang into life and tinged the whole room with a fantastic pallor.

Then he turned towards those starry curtains, through

which he had entered the chamber, and parting them uttered some words in a tone of kindly command.

"Come hither," he said, "daughter of Fortune, and behold the face of the Philistines."

Almost immediately the figure of a woman, robed and veiled in white, appeared in the opening. The woman walked slowly into the room, and came to a halt at the side of the table, with her hands folded cross-wise over her bosom. There were rich jewels on her fingers and round her neck in a great chain.

"Daughter," said the sage, "tell me, and tell these here present, how long it is that you have lived upon this world of ours."

The woman answered slowly and clearly.

"Truly I cannot spell, to the nicety of a year, the tale of the generations I have summered and wintered. But, as I believe, they must be either a little less or a little more than the sum of three hundred years."

The sound of these words appeared to exercise a great fascination upon the ample lady, who leaned forward, staring through the greenish light.

"Unveil, my daughter," the sage now ordered, "and show to these strangers and sceptics with what manner of countenance you have weathered the suns and rains of three centuries."

The woman threw aside her veil and revealed to her spectators a countenance that seemed, in that strange light, of almost unearthly beauty.

The ample lady leaned back with a queer catch in the throat, and eyes that glowed through the holes in the vizard. The page leaned forward, quick in admiration.

The sage took the woman by the hand and drew her a little nearer to the pair of spectators who were both staring avidly at her through their masks.

"I take it," said the sage, "that if you were asked the question, you would not give this woman a longer lease of what we are pleased to call life than five and twenty years?"

"Truly, reverend sir," the page replied, "I should not be ready to allot her so great a term. How much, therefore, do you give her?"



"I cannot tell you precisely," replied the sage, "because I have only known her myself for some twenty-one years or so, at which time she appeared precisely the same as she now appears before you. But from what I have learned from those that entrusted her to my care, and from papers they gave into my charge, and from her own statements, as uttered under the influence of enchanted sleep, I assume that she cannot be less than several hundred years old."

"She wears well for her age," said the masked page, drily. "I take it, master sage, that you are ready and willing to submit some testimony to your staggering assertion?"

"I am more ready than willing," the sage replied gravely. "It is no part of my desire to make the wonder of this woman generally known, for she is in other ways of such rare service to myself and my fellowship that I have no wish to waste her time and ours over a matter which is, after all, of little importance."

"A side issue," the page commented ironically, with a marked grimness of note. "Let me tell you, master sage, that the power to confer eternal or well-nigh eternal youth does not seem, in my eyes, so slight a trifle as you pretend to think it."

The sage bowed his cowed head, with a gesture of patient protest, which had its effect in placating the vexation of his visitor, who continued:

"If there be truth in those marvellous tales, you will find that it may be of more import to you than aught which could occupy your hours. But I am not very easy to convince in the case of a latter-day miracle."

Again the sage made the same patient gesture of protestation as if he, from courtesy, refrained from saying that it was a matter of perfect indifference to him whether his hearer was convinced or no. The speaker went on.

"Have I your permission to question this young-old maiden, according to my fancy?"

"Surely," the sage replied. "Ask of the maiden what you will, and she will answer you according to the best of her wit. But hear first some records in support of what I say."

He drew from a golden casket a small bundle of parchments, loosely tied together with a silken cord.

"I hold here," he said, "a series of documents dating back

for no less than three centuries, recording duly the various dates upon which the Elixir of Youth was administered to the maid whom you see here before you. Here," he said, "we have the testimony of Nicholas van Hopp, of Burges, dated a hundred years ago, and setting forth in moderate Latin that, on the Eve of St. John, in the year of our Lord 1468, he was present at the administration to a damsel, duly described, of a certain cordial, which he was soberly informed would have the effect of prolonging her life for another century. And here we have another, a hundred years earlier, which offers a similar statement on the part of the Archbishop of Paris, duly given under his great seal, in the year of our Lord 1368. And here again, his Holiness the Pope of Rome, in the year of our Lord 1268, declares that he was attendant at the administration of a drug or balsam to a young female, said drug or balsam being alleged to have certain marvellous properties for the preservation of life and the seeming of youth."

"Now these indeed are very proper documents, and very marvellous," said the page, "if so be they are genuine, but who proposes to vouch for their genuineness?"

The page turned to the girl, who all this time had remained standing in the same attitude of tranquil and graceful repose, exquisitely poised upon her feet, with her long arms lying lightly adown her sides, and looking tranquilly before her, as if she were wholly indifferent to the fact that she was the subject of so much speech.

"You assert," said the page sharply, "what he asserts—that you are not what you seem—a girl in her early twenties—but a woman that has lived, with your fair show of youth, through many centuries?"

"I cannot tell how old I am," the woman replied, calmly, "but I seem to have been living for an age-long time, and to have seen many generations perish about me. And I can remember, when I remember, times when the world was different from what it is to-day."

"What do you mean," asked the page, "when you say that you can remember, when you remember?"

Before the girl could reply, the sage, raising his head, interposed and spoke.

"The maiden you behold," he said, "does not remember her

past lives while she is, as now, in her waking state. She can only recall them to mind when she lies under the influence of the enchanted sleep."

"How does she come under that influence?" the page asked, "for it is of that same past that I am wishful to learn somewhat."

"I have the art," the sage replied, "to cast upon her a drowsiness which soon transforms itself into the deepest sleep. In that sleep it is given to her to review her past, and to recall the names and faces of ancient days."

"Let me see this done," said the page, with a note of command which the sage seemed to ignore.

"It shall be as you desire," he replied. He turned to the beautiful woman.

"Daughter of the centuries," he commanded, "take thy ease on yonder couch, and surrender your spirit to the solicitation of the spell."

The girl moved slowly towards the couch, upon which she reclined in an attitude of easy grace. The sage stood behind her, raising his hands above her head, as if in an act of benediction.

"Close your eyes," the sage commanded, and the recumbent girl obeyed him. She lay quite still, her bosom gently responding to her easy suspiration.

The white-robed sage bowed over her and began to make various movements with his hands, placing them now near, and anon far removed from the forehead of the reclining girl. After a few minutes of this curious exercise, it was patent to the spectators that the girl was, or at least seemed to be, in a very profound sleep. She lay very still, lightly breathing, her face perfectly calm and her eyes closely lidded.

"Now speak," said the sage, "ask what you will."

The page addressed the entranced lady.

"Woman, tell me the truth concerning this business of the Elixir of Youth, for indeed it would be a desirable matter to remain young through the ages."

The woman on the couch spoke slowly in reply, as one that speaks in a dream.

"I can only speak truth to those who are themselves truthful. You come here in a feigned habit. You are not what seem."

"If you can tell me truly who I am," said the page, "I shall have a livelier mind to believe you."

"You wear the garments of a man," said the entranced lady, slowly, "but I know you for a woman, and for one that bears a great name among women. For you carry the name of a saint, and that saint's name is Elizabeth."

The page turned angrily towards the motionless sage.

"You should have taught better manners to this creature," he said angrily. "I am in no temper to be lessoned by your paramour of to-day, as she has no doubt been the paramour of many in the long years of her pilgrimage."

"She is now," said the sage, gravely, "as she has ever been—a pure virgin. It were indeed well for the realm and the world if all who pride themselves publicly upon their title to virginity could command as clear a right."

The wearer of the page's dress seemed to take this remark as if it were a direct challenge, to be taken up with angry words.

"As God lives, master mountebank, those words of yours, if they have any meaning, would seem to reflect upon the character of an august and sovereign princess, for whom, I can assure you, I cherish the profoundest respect and admiration."

The carriage of the sage seemed to stiffen a little, and his glance, directed towards the speaker, to grow sterner in its regard.

"If you speak of the woman who usurps the throne of England," he said, with a grim calmness, "you speak very vainly and foolishly."

The figure in the page's habit made as if to rise in anger, but was anxiously restrained by her buxom companion, while the extended hand of the sage was directed like a menace.

"Elizabeth Tudor," he cried in a commanding voice, "your curiosity has done you an ill turn. You are my prisoner here."

The stout lady uttered a scream, and began to rock to and fro, in a show of perturbation, which was in no wise shared by her companion. On the contrary, the seeming page straightened in his chair, and addressed the menacer in a shrill, imperious voice.

"Do you dare, mad ape, to address this treason-speech to

me? Fall on your knees, preposterous juggler, and sue for the pardon you so little deserve."

"Elizabeth Tudor," said the sage, calmly, "it is folly to waste these imperial airs on me. You are in my power, and your very life depends upon my clemency and your obedience."

The slim figure in the page's dress received this menace with an unmoved mien. But her bulky companion leaned forward, as if to interpose a shield between the seeming page and the threatening wizard.

"Why do you speak of Elizabeth Tudor?" the large female asked in a large voice. "If there be anyone named Elizabeth here—for in some degree your prophetess has spoken rightly—it is not Elizabeth Tudor."

The woman on the couch, sloughing the sybil, moved to a sitting posture, and stared at the speaker. The sage seemed, of a sudden, to be shaken by a passion of doubt.

"You are Elizabeth Tudor," he screamed at the slender page, in a voice that was half a question and half a command.

The page clapped his trim hands on his hips and laughed very jollily.

"My name is not Elizabeth," he cried, "nor yet Tudor, and I am neither queen or maid, but plain Martin Mayblow, at your disservice, of my lord of Roehampton's Fellowship of players."

The sage recoiled, with a sound in his throat that was no articulate imprecation, but the very sum and compendium of all possible curses, and his right hand clutched under his white gown for the weapon that waited there. The woman leaned back with a gasp that might mean either fear or relief. In that instant of suspense the ample lady produced a silver whistle and blew it shrilly.

But even as the wizard made to spring forward with up-lifted dagger, there rose from outside the calling of many voices, the clatter of many weapons, and a beating on the door below.

The sage leaped towards the starry curtains and vanished, just as there came a rush of feet on the staircase. A moment later armed men flooded into the chamber.

In that chamber the invaders found Henry Elizabeth kicking himself free from a huddle of quilted petticoats, and straightening himself, with satisfaction, from the crouching,

almost kneeling, posture which he had been compelled to adopt to lessen the length of his legs under their voluminous curtains.

Martin Mayblow, unmasked, leaned against a chair, and whistled "Summer is a-coming in." A woman sat with her head in her hands, on a couch against the wall, and a white gown lay on the floor. That was all that remained to suggest the existence of the wizard.

Henry Elizabeth turned to the black-favoured fellow that led his confederates.

"The fox has found an earth. Stop it if you can. Hold the house in the Queen's name till her majesty sends to take it over."

The Knave of Spades nodded, and he and his band scattered over the mansion. But Nostradamus the Second was not to be found.

Martin Mayblow continued whistling. Henry Elizabeth advanced towards the bowed woman on the couch.

"Lady," he said gravely, "you must come with me." The woman shook her head, and Henry Elizabeth could hear that she was sobbing hysterically. "You must come with me," he repeated, "it is for your safety I say it. If you were found here when the Queen's people come, it would go ill with you."

He paused for a moment, and then finding that she made no sign of rising, he wasted no more breath in entreaty, but stooping, caught her from the couch and held her to his breast as he might have held a child. And the woman, as if reassured and soothed by the manifestation of the strength and of the genuineness, resisted no more, but lay passive in his clasp.

"To the boat, Martin," cried Henry Elizabeth, and dashed at full speed through the door and down the staircase and past the rooms, now echoing with the trampling and clamours of his followers, as they made prisoners of its occupants and hunted for the master of the house. He was quickly in the garden, with Mayblow at his heels, and swiftly at the landing-stage, where Master Buttonshaw awaited him, keeping ward upon the river porter, whom he had knocked into silence with the boathook, while Candlejohn, with his sword and bucklers, sat in his place in the stern. Henry Elizabeth placed his captive in the wherry, which in another moment was on its way to London.

## CHAPTER V

### LUDOVICA

**T**HAT voyage down the river seemed to Henry Elizabeth like a journey in a wonderful dream. The woman he worshipped was sitting by his side, enveloped in a boat-cloak. He had forgotten the sterling service he had just rendered to his sovereign. He was unconscious of the delighted smiles of Buttonshaw, Mayblow, and Candlejohn who regarded themselves with rapture as playing real parts in a better piece than they had ever interpreted in the court-yard of an inn.

When the boat began to approach the limits of Westminster, it swerved in its course, in obedience to a gesture from Henry Elizabeth and presently made for the shore a little above Whitefriars. Here Henry Elizabeth and his captive disembarked and the young man, waving a farewell to his comrades, led the silent and unresisting woman through the tangle of narrow streets, till he came to Master Gallop's dwelling. Here he conducted his companion to the library, which his host, who was anxiously awaiting his arrival, surrendered to him for the occasion.

Henry Elizabeth's spirit bubbled with an unfamiliar sense of ecstasy, when he found himself thus securely alone with the being who, by her single appearance on a sunny afternoon, had shifted the whole course of his life. Yet, as he now regarded her, he found nothing to wonder at in what he had done, or in what he was prepared to do. Still she seemed to him, as she had seemed on that first disdainful day, at once the emblem and the incarnation of all that he really desired in life. He thought these thoughts along a tissue of confused threads, but he would have given years and blood and tears to be able to put them into flaming words.

"Dear lady," he began, hushing his jolly voice to a gentle

pipe, "I would have you to know very certainly that you have nothing in the world to fear from me, and that if you are, as it would seem, for the moment my prisoner, that is only because it were better for you to be thus unlawfully in my keeping than lawfully in the custody of the Governor of the Tower."

The woman nodded her head a little, as if she agreed in this, but still she did not speak, and still Henry Elizabeth wondered what he could say that might persuade her to give him her trust.

"I fear," he began, with a hesitation unfamiliar to his downrightness, "that I have been the direct, albeit unexpected, means of grievously crossing and thwarting certain plans of yours and your friends."

"They were no plans of mine," said the woman wearily. "They were the plans of my friends, if it please you so to call them."

"This is a good hearing," said Henry Elizabeth cheerfully, "for, to be frank with you, though I would shield your person from any ill-consequences of the adventure you are involved in, I am honestly a Queen's man from hilt to point, and will make no manner of terms with her enemies."

The woman listened to him gravely, and very presently she spoke.

"You are a strange fellow," she said, "and I have not met your like before. For you seem to have a simple mind, that does not weigh chances, nor plot for advantage, nor scheme, nor intrigue, nor lie; but that urges you very directly on the high road of manhood and honour. And my way of life has not been mixed with such fine simplicity."

"What, in God's name," cried Henry Elizabeth, "is your way of life, and who are these people you go with and work with, playing false parts? I would stake my soul that, whatever has befallen you, you have a clean mind and a clean heart. How then comes it that you move in such sorry company? If, as you say, you think I am trustworthy, will you not make plain to me why these things are so?"

"Why do you want to know my story?" the woman asked, sadly. She looked very wan and piteous, as she sat with her hands clasped about her knees.

"For a very simple reason," the young man answered, "that



may be a foolish reason to your mind, but is a mighty wise reason to mine—and the reason is that I love you.”

A faint glow of colour came into the grey hue of the tired girl's cheeks, and a faint gleam of animation into her jaded eyes.

“The reason might be good enough,” she said wistfully, “but it calls for its own explanation. You have seen me three times, and you have the courage to tell me that you love me.

“I loved you the first moment that I saw you, by the forge at Braginton,” said Henry Elizabeth, resolutely. “I loved you only the more when I encountered you outside the Cathedral at Exeter. I loved you just now while I blamed you when you played the fool for that damnable sham wizard of yours. I have it in my mind that I shall always love you, good times and bad times and all.”

She listened to his earnestness, with a growing flush upon her cheeks.

“It is pleasant to hear you speak like that,” she said, “for your words sound as if they meant what they said.”

“That is precisely what they do mean,” he assured her and glowed as he gazed. He felt, of a sudden, that he was living as he had never lived before, as he had never dreamed of living, as he had never hoped to live. All the meaning of the world for him seemed to be shut within that narrow space, and to centre upon the pale, strange, beautiful she that faced him. She smiled sadly at his ardour.

“You are a gallant gentleman,” she protested, “and such an one as any woman might be proud to hold for her servant. Would to God that you could be mine.”

“I am your servant,” Henry Elizabeth asserted. He did not know himself in this wild mood of surrendering devotion, but the mood had to be obeyed, and it forced the truth out of him. “I will do for you anything that you may be pleased to will, so long as it be work undertakeable by a man of honour. I love you, I love you, I love you,”—his great voice almost thinned to a scream as he spoke—“and I want you to give me the chance to prove it.”

“There is only one thing in the world that I want done for me,” said the girl, dully, “and it is a thing that it is hard to ask of a man that tells me to my face that he loves me.”

"What is this thing?" he asked. "Tell me, and see if I fail you in your need."

"There is a gentleman who is very dear to me——" so the girl began, and paused as she saw the pallor of the man's face at her phrase. Indeed he felt as if someone with a giant's knuckles had struck him a staggering blow upon the heart. But he pulled himself together, with the kind of ferocity he would have instinctively used to a bucking horse.

"Say what you have to say," he urged, in a tone that was almost half entreaty and more than half command, "I am your servant!"

The woman laced and unlaced the fingers of her hands, nervously. They were meant to be very white hands, and were habitually cared for in that understanding, but now they were grimed and dusked with travel. All the more pitiable and none the less kissable for that, Henry Elizabeth assured himself, and tried to show a brave face for the tale that the girl had to tell him.

"You must know," the girl began, slowly, "that I am an English woman, although I have lived the most of my little life in France. My name is Ludovica Campion. My family were gentlefolk that devoted themselves to the house of Lorraine. As for the man who is my master, he too has lived the greater part of his life in France."

She paused for a little, as if she were at a loss what to say next. Henry Elizabeth forced himself to speak, though his tongue seemed stubborn in dumbness.

"What do you mean," he asked, "when you speak of the man who is your master?"

"I call him my master," the girl answered sadly, "because he is indeed my master. He is my husband, and yet he is not my husband, for I am still a maid. But I am as much in his power as if I were his very slave."

Henry Elizabeth gaped at her, not understanding, but longing to understand. He pitied this woman profoundly, as he desired her hotly, and he raged at his own helplessness to put his passionate worship into ringing words. He could not speak, but something of what he felt showed itself lively on his face, and encouraged the woman to go on.

"Since you have told me," she said, with a sudden flush that filled her face with a clear colour and, for the moment,

conquered chagrin and fatigue, "that you find me not unlovely, I may tell you frankly that I have had many wooers. Of these there were some I disliked, some I disdained, one that I detested, and one"—her voice dropped to the thinnest of whispers—"that I loved."

Once again Henry Elizabeth felt as if his lusty heart were struck with the stroke of giant fingers. But he did no more than bend his head, as if in recognition of her confession, and the woman continued.

"The man I detested was the man you have seen with me, the man whom I must needs call my master."

"Sir Matthew Favill," said her companion, grimly.

Ludovica nodded.

"You know his name. Of all my suitors he was the most favoured by my family, as of all my suitors the man I loved was the least favoured. He was called Philip Harrington, a cadet of an honourable house. Did you ever hear his name?"

Henry Elizabeth shook his head silently, and the girl went on.

"I had no voice in the matter. I was told that I was to marry the man whom I did not love, and I knew that in the ordinary course I had no way of escape. But I saw my lover in secret and we planned to escape together, to go anywhere, it mattered not where, so long as we were together."

Henry Elizabeth choked a nascent groan out of existence. It wrung his heart to hear this woman speak as she spoke, but he reminded himself, almost angrily, that he was her servant, whatever might befall. He wanted to speak, but he found that he could not command any words to the purpose and the woman went on with her tale.

"He, the man, knew everything, when I did not dream that he even suspected anything. He watched, with a smiling face that flattered my folly. He snared us together, and held us at his mercy. His servants took my lover apart, while my master spoke with me. There was no need for him to say much, for I knew that he meant every word that he said. He told me that I had dishonoured him in thought, if not in fact, but that he had no mind to kill me for my crime, because he had other uses for me. Nor did he propose to kill my lover. He would keep him alive in a sure place, as security for my obedience in the task he meant to set me. If I promised that

obedience, and so long as I obeyed, then my lover should live and be humanely entreated. If, and when, I refused to obey, then my lover should be killed."

The listener watched the pale, tearless face and heard the firm, unhappy speech, with a bitter pain at his heart. But he kept silence, waiting for the woman to go on, and the woman went on.

"There was nothing for me to do but to obey. He told me his terms, with my lover's life as the price of my agreement. Firstly, I was to marry him, though he swore to me that our marriage should be no more than a form, until I myself, on my knees, entreated him to make it otherwise. When that day came, and he had made me indeed his wife, my lover should be set free. But, until that day, if I wished to secure life for my lover, I was to obey him implicitly, and serve him absolutely in the plots upon which he was engaged."

Henry Elizabeth listened dully to the iteration of the words "my lover" on the lips of the woman he loved. It seemed to him that he was undergoing a very exquisite form of suffering, and he wondered a little, being still very unsophisticated, that the woman did not realize the pain she was causing him. But it was plain, even to his simplicity, that the woman was thinking very little about him, and very much about her own case.

"These same plots," she continued, "were all, in the main, for his own gain and advancement, although he was pleased to pretend that he was devoted to the house of Guise, and the Queen of Scots. I believe, in his heart, he cares nothing for any cause, or any purpose, or any person, but he chooses to air an extravagant devotion to Marie Stuart. His profession was to serve her by liberating her from captivity, and by obtaining control of the person of your Queen, so as to hold her for a hostage until the wishes of the Queen of Scots were fulfilled. But I think that, in reality, his scheme was to secure the persons of both these queens, and then to make his terms with the two parties that followed them, prepared to surrender either woman for the highest price he could obtain."

"The man must be mad," Henry Elizabeth said angrily.

The woman shook her head.

"He is not mad," she said, "but he is as daring as he is wary, and he is well aware that the adventurer may gain

much, who is ready to risk all on his adventure. He laid his snares with great cunning and ability. His first essay was to liberate the Queen of Scots from her captivity. It has been said of me that I resemble in form and features that unhappy princess."

Henry Elizabeth remembered the miniature that he had seen in the possession of Master Lillingworth, and he bent his head in agreement.

"It was because of that resemblance," Ludovica continued, "that he made his first essay with me. We were about that business when we encountered you in the West Country. We journeyed to Exeter to meet privily the Duke of Norfolk, who, as you may have heard, wished to marry the Queen of Scots, and was ready to join in any plot for her liberation."

Henry Elizabeth remembered now what he had heard at Chard in the dawn of his pilgrimage, and wondered a little at the devious courses of the great.

"The plan was a simple one enough," Ludovica said. "The Queen of Scots, while she was captive at Carlisle, was treated with much consideration, and freely allowed the liberty of riding abroad, so long as she was accompanied by an English guard of mounted soldiers. In her rides she often outstripped her escort by a great distance, and they had much ado to keep up with her. Sir Matthew's plan was that, on a certain day, the Queen should get ahead of her guards, and enter a thick wood in the neighbourhood. There she was to find me waiting for her, habited in like fashion to herself. I was to mount her horse and ride slowly out of the wood again, as if the Queen had changed her mind, and was to lead the guard in another direction; while the Queen of Scots, on a fresh horse, rode hard for the Border, with Sir Matthew and his friends."

"This was to put you in grave peril," Henry Elizabeth said, angrily.

Ludovica smiled faintly.

"The Queen of Scots was of more importance than I. But Sir Matthew, for his own ends, had taken precautions for my safety. Where I was to ride, a company of gentlemen were to be concealed until I reached them. He relied upon their strength, and the certainty that I was not, as the English guard fancied, the Queen their prisoner, to throw the guard into confusion and, if needs were, into defeat."

"It was not a bad plan," Henry Elizabeth said, thoughtfully. "How was it that it did not come about?"

"Some whisper of the conspiracy came to the ears of the Queen's warders, I know not how," Ludovica replied. "Some said the Duke of Norfolk talked loosely. Who knows? Anyway the Queen's guard was doubled, and she was no longer suffered at ease, but was ever preceded by a strong company."

"Your Queen of Scots must be an unlucky lady," said Henry Elizabeth.

Ludovica sighed.

"So it would seem. After this plan failed, Sir Matthew changed his mode of action, and cast about to obtain possession of the person of the English Queen. He was, as I believe, aided or supported therein by the Duke, and you know how nearly his plot came to success."

While Ludovica spoke, Henry Elizabeth watched her with devotion. All that he had felt on the day when he saw her by the forge, all that he felt on the day when he encountered her at Exeter, he felt anew; his passion even burning with a hotter flame. He himself was, as he well knew, changed in most regards. In this thing he was unchanged. In a little space of months he had striven to remake himself, had, at the end, found himself, and now surveyed the world with a very different vision from that which had rested upon the fields and lanes of Braginton. But he looked upon this woman with the same admiration, with the same love. If it stabbed his heart to learn that her dearest thoughts were given to another man, his great sense of loyalty healed the wounds, even as they were made. He had come to understand, at last, the meaning of the words she had spoken so scornfully in the face of the old Cathedral, the words which pronounced the true meaning of love. He knew now that he had cast away his old selfishness, and that his love was a better angel in this hour, when it told him that he was to serve his mistress without wage and without reward. But if his thoughts warmed his blood, he kept them to himself.

"Do you know," she asked, "of a place that is called Lundy Island?"

Henry Elizabeth was in no mirthful mood, but he could not refrain from a smile at the question.

"I am a West Country man," he said, "so I could scarcely fail to know of Lundy."

"I know little of England," the woman said, "but I have been by ship to Lundy once. That was on the day before I met you at the forge. My master is lord of the island, and he holds my dear one there a prisoner."

Henry Elizabeth asked himself, dully, how the world would seem to him if he were the happy man of whom this woman spoke as her dear one. But he put a brave face on it when he spoke.

"How does it come about that Sir Matthew is the lord of Lundy Island? I always heard that it belonged to the Mariscos."

"My master," she said, "has some hold over the present Marisco, and is, as I believe, the real ruler of the island. It is a useful place for him to control, and was to prove of service to him in his present ventures."

"And how does it come about," Henry Elizabeth asked, "that your friend is a prisoner in Lundy?"

"That is a simple tale," said Ludovica. "When he and I agreed to fly from France, it was our purpose to make for England. But ere we could reach the coast, Sir Matthew and his men came up with us, having learned of our purpose, and made us prisoners. It was not very difficult—a dozen men against one man and a woman."

"Sir Matthew likes to play a safe game," said Henry Elizabeth, slowly.

"He likes to win," Ludovica answered, "and he won. My friend was carried, gagged and bound, on board a ship that lay at Sir Matthew's command. To save his life I went through the form of marriage with Sir Matthew, and then I, too, went aboard his ship. We sailed, in the first place, for this island—Lundy Island—and there my lover was put ashore. Thereafter we sailed for Brixham, for Sir Matthew had business there with a friend of his, one Nicholas Gardwood"—Henry Elizabeth nodded understanding of the name—"and chose rather to travel by sea than by land."

"And what," asked Henry Elizabeth, "would you have me to do at Lundy Island?"

The woman answered him wistfully.

"You know well enough what I would have you do, but

I know well enough that I have not the right to ask you to do it."

The man did indeed know what the woman wished, and he felt as if she had twisted her fingers in the strings of his heart as she spoke. But he answered her cheerfully.

"You have the best right in the world," he protested, "to command me in anything that can give you pleasure. I take it that you would be glad if I could bring a certain prisoner free out of Lundy."

"Could you do this thing?" she cried clasping her hands, and looking at him eagerly. "Will you do this thing? Remember that I have nothing to give you in return."

"When I told you that I loved you," Henry Elizabeth said, simply, "I meant what I said. I am your true servant, and there is nothing that I would not dare and do in your service, let alone a little thing like a journey to Lundy Island."

"You talk very big," Ludovica said, with a sigh, "and you talk as if you meant what you said. But it would be no easy business for one of the Queen's own captains to achieve, with the Queen's commission in his hand."

"I will never admit that the Queen has any better man than I in her service," Henry Elizabeth said, confidently, "and as for that same commission you speak of, I make little doubt that I shall have that when I will."

"The island," said the woman, "is held by desperate men, who serve no law but my master's will."

"When I go to Lundy Island," said Henry Elizabeth, cheerfully, "I shall probably carry one or two desperate men in my company that had better, if they value their necks, know no law but my will. And, for all I am so easy-going, I can be as desperate as another, when I am put to the push."

The woman almost smiled to find him so ebullient in his self-confidence.

"It warms my heart," she said, "to hear you talk like that, and while you talk I believe you. But when I think I know that the task is too difficult."

"There is nothing in the wide world," said Henry Elizabeth, "that a man can do which I would admit to call difficult. So leave this matter of Lundy for me to deal with, and if it be permitted to mortal man to fulfil your wish, your wish shall be fulfilled."



Ludovica looked at him sadly.

"I wish," she sighed, "that I had known you earlier, when I was, in every way, a free woman."

"I am content to have known you when the time came," Henry Elizabeth said, simply. "I am content to be able to serve you."

"I think you are a very true gentleman," she said gently.

Henry Elizabeth smiled.

"I was a rough country clown when I first beheld you," he said, "but I hope and believe that I have amended a little since that day. And now, by your leave, I will say no more on this matter, but get to the doing of what has to be done, as speedily as may be. And, in the first place, I will make arrangements through Master Gallop for the speedy conveying of you to a place of greater safety for you than this house, a place where you shall be surely hid from the knowledge and the craft of Favill."

In this Henry Elizabeth was swiftly able to keep his word, with the aid of Master Gallop. The jester who, as it were, carried London in his pocket, knew of a religious Sisterhood still standing though in straitened condition, and tolerated by the express wish of the queen. Here the unhappy lady might find shelter, at least for a time, till she decided on her future course. Ludovica agreed to this course gladly. She had money and estates in France but in the mean time the jewels which she wore were worth a great sum and would enable her to repay the Sisters' hospitality generously. So it was arranged.

## CHAPTER VI

### ELIZABETH AGAIN

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH was never a one to waste time in quarrelling with things as they are unless it were in his power to turn them into things as he would have them be. It was as clear as shoal water to him that the lady of his dreams was not likely to become the lady of his reality, so he took a grip of himself and vowed to think as little as might be of the prize he could not have and as much as might be of the work he was called upon to do.

To the palace therefore he went his way, thinking out his plans as he fared, and at the palace he did not have to keep antechamber long, for in a few minutes he found himself in the presence of his sovereign.

The queen greeted her visitor eagerly.

"Well, namesake," she cried, "what news do you bring of the magician?"

"Your majesty," Henry Elizabeth answered gravely, "it was well for yourself and for your kingdom that you listened to your poor servant. The house of wisdom was a house of villainy, and its purpose to get possession of your royal person."

And thereupon, spurred by vehement questions from the queen, he proceeded to tell her in detail all that had occurred, or nearly all, on his visit to the wizard. Elizabeth showed no sense of alarm or even of anger at the danger she had escaped, but was as curious as a child to know everything that had passed during the session of cheating and treachery. She was greatly diverted over the account of how Martin Mayblow carried it as queen in boy's clothes, and she listened with a smile that grew graver to the description of the wizard and the woman who was his accomplice.

"It is a pity that the pair got away," she said. "You would have crowned your conquest with two such captives."

Now Henry Elizabeth had made up his mind, before going to his interview with the queen, that he would say nothing of the fact that he was sheltering Ludovica. He foresaw the perils to which the girl would be exposed if he acknowledged that she was in his keeping, and he therefore told his tale in such a way as to convey the impression that the sage and his accomplice had both escaped in the confusion.

"I should like to know who they were," said the queen at the end of his recital, regarding him under puckered brows. Henry Elizabeth nodded.

"I should know the woman wherever I saw her again," he replied truthfully untruthful. "The man's face I did not see plainly, but I think I can promise your majesty that I shall run him to earth one day. I shall never rest till I do."

"Well," said the queen, "you have done me a service and deserve a reward. What do you wish for?"

Henry Elizabeth was silent for a little, dipped in meditation and eyeing the smiling queen. Then he spoke.

"Does your majesty know of a piece of God's earth that is called Lundy Island?"

The queen's mouth tightened a little.

"I know it," she said. "Is it not the wasp's nest of the West Country?"

"You asked me if I wished for a reward," said Henry Elizabeth. "To serve you is its own reward, but if you think I merit your favour will you give me leave to smoke out that same wasp's nest?"

"Can you brush and comb Lundy Island," the queen asked doubtfully. "Can you sweep it and garnish it? Can you make that den of devils a God-fearing, law-abiding cleanliness? Can you so cut and cure that plague-spot of the West that it shall be hereafter sweet and wholesome?"

"I can do all that and I can do it for you single-headed," Henry Elizabeth replied, "but I say nothing of doing it single-handed. To be frank with your majesty the job will cost a bit of money."

The queen's face clouded and she smiled a little disdainfully for this was touching her upon a tender point.

"Are you nosing at the door of our treasury," she questioned. "Is that the Alpha and Omega of your enterprise?"

Henry Elizabeth shook his head.

"If, as I believe, Lundy is a store of treasure, it should provide its own money for its own defeat. I do not ask a coin from your majesty's pocket"—Elizabeth visibly brightened—"but I have certain conditions which I wish respectfully to propose to your majesty. It will take a club of tough fellows to get a hold on Lundy and those same tough fellows will ask their reward, and my private purse is not wide enough or deep enough to satisfy their desires. I shall therefore make so bold as to entreat from your majesty a paper or charter authorising me to act as your agent in this business of Lundy, and empowering me to raise in your name such a company of adventurers as will be willing to act under me for a share of the spoil if the deed be accomplished."

The queen's face crinkled into a smile of approbation. A daring enterprise was ever near her heart, but when it served her and yet cost her nothing it nestled closer still.

"You are a cunning fellow," she cried. "Is that all that you want in this matter?"

"Not quite," Henry Elizabeth answered. "There is still something more behind my mind. Tough fellows that will go to the devil for the sake of a pick at plunder have their uses in an enterprise like ours, but so have smooth fellows that stay at home and risk no breaking of bones but are ready to put good money into adventure on the assurance of a fair share of the spoil. Have I your majesty's permission to gather me such a backing of honest citizens," said Henry Elizabeth, his mind reverting to Gallop and his friends, "as shall fill my war chest and outfit my rascals who shall fare with me to Lundy."

The queen was silent for a moment, and then with a great jingling of jewelled chains, rattling of pearl necklace against pearl necklace, creaking of stays and rustling of silks, she rose and swam across the room to an escritoire that stood against the wall. There, with a quickness that seemed little short of miraculous to Henry Elizabeth, she wrote some lines upon a paper and signed it with her characteristic signature. Then she turned and came towards him.

"There," she said, extending her hand with the paper in it, "there is your charter to act as our representative in the regaining of our Island of Lundy from the false knaves who have usurped it of late, and our authority to seize and remove

any treasures found on the said island. Also I have put in a word or so to say that any who aid you in money or otherwise are entitled to look upon themselves as doing good service to their sovereign, and this you may show if you find it necessary."

Henry Elizabeth took the paper with a deep bow, though he did not attempt to read it then as he knew that was a task that would take him some time. When he looked up he found the queen regarding him with a smile and a certain expression of face that, if he had seen it on the face of a country lass would have made him, in past times, throw an arm around her and give her a sounding kiss. To say that the great queen was looking provocative, or inviting, that something like a leer was parting those thin red lips, might have seemed almost like treason to the West Country man, but nevertheless the expression on her face was one that had been made familiar to him by seeing it on the faces of other and humbler she-things. Therefore he responded to it in the fashion that the case seemed to demand, by flinging himself on to his knee before her, seizing one of her delicate hands in his and pressing it to his lips with a vehemence which she did not often feel. She allowed him to retain it for a moment and then slowly drew it away.

"There, there," she said in a voice which showed the young man that she was far from feeling displeased at his ardour, "I like to see gratitude, but that is no reason why you should try to devour this poor hand. See what a mark you have left," and she spread out the embraced hand before Henry Elizabeth's eyes, who could see a faint pink mark on the white skin where his lips had pressed it.

"Your grace," he said rising, "it is not often that I feed upon such fare. It must be forgiven me that I make as full a meal as is permitted when I have the opportunity."

The queen pretended to frown but the pretence was poor, and Master Bowyer having once or twice already put in his head to intimate that the next candidate for an audience was awaiting her majesty's pleasure, she dismissed the young man very kindly, and with something almost like a regard for him stirring in her cold heart.

## CHAPTER VII

### NEWS FROM BRAGINTON

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH quitted the palace with a heart stuffed with resolution and a head humming with projects. He was bound, in the first place, for Whitefriars where he knew that the four knaves would aid him to raise the levy he desired. Whitefriars was full of broken men, but Henry Elizabeth knew well enough that many a man may be broken for an ordered world, who may prove an excellent abettor on a desperate adventure. In the second place he was resolved to consult with Master Gallop, with a view to the raising of the much-needed loan.

He was so thick in his busy thoughts, that he did not heed a man who had been waiting in a doorway hard by the palace, and who was now steadily dogging Henry Elizabeth's footsteps, slow and measured by reason of his meditations. Steadily and stealthily this watcher followed the course of his quarry, keeping him ever in sight all along the Strand.

The face of the watcher was meant by nature to be a kindly face and a simple, but now it was twisted with hate and illuminated with the queer cunning of revenge.

Henry Elizabeth turned into the Liberties of the Temple, with Hanging-Sword Alley for his destination. He was now moving more slowly than ever, as his musings defined themselves into form and body.

Quite suddenly, in a lonely shadowed place, a man came up to him and gripped him by the arm, calling him by name. Henry Elizabeth turned sharply and shook himself free.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"I have sought you," the man said, "to tell you that you are a villain and a damned villain."

"That may be so, or may not be so," Henry Elizabeth

answered, composedly, "but who, in the devil's name are you that choose to tell me this?"

"You have forgotten so much," said the man bitterly, "in the months of your cowardice, that you may well have forgotten me. But if you look a little on my face, you may know it for the face of a man that would be glad to kill you."

"I take a deal of killing," said Henry Elizabeth, calmly, "and you, my friend, are not the man for the job, whoever you may be. Come out into the light and let me have a look at you."

Big as the man was, and broad as the man was, and hot and bitter with anger as the man was, he did not seem able to resist the domination of Henry Elizabeth. He moved obediently into the clearer light so as to afford the other man a better view of his angry countenance.

"Truly," said Henry Elizabeth, "I know you now, though it is a long time since your name has had a place in my thoughts. You are Tobias Flood of Paignton. And what do you want of me, Tobias Flood?"

"To tell you that you are a villain," the man answered, hotly, "a damnable villain."

"You have said as much already," said Henry Elizabeth, "but you have given me no reason for your say. What business have you with me that you make so bold as to call me names?"

"You are a bigger man than I, Master Braginton," said the other sullenly, "and it may be a stronger man, though it is many a long day since you and I have had a bout together, and it is because you are so cocksure of your quality that you bear yourself so high. But you may swagger as you please, yet you shall not hinder me from calling you knave to your face."

"Neither will you hinder me from flattening your face if you continue to plague me," said Henry Elizabeth, still equably. "Give a name to your grudge, whatever it is, or else have done with your babble and go your ways."

Tobias Flood glared at him with bitter animosity traced on every line of his large, simple face.

"Have you forgotten your wife?" he questioned, with a queer snarl in his voice, that contrasted oddly with his ordinary placable guise.

Henry Elizabeth gaped at him.

"I have not forgotten my wife," he said, "because I never remember her. Man alive, I am not married, though time was when I hoped to be."

Tobias Flood drew back a pace and looked hard at him, with a dull frown on his puzzled face.

"What do you mean," he asked slowly, "when you say that you are not married?"

"I mean just what I always mean," Henry Elizabeth replied, "when I give a plain answer to a plain question, and that is, just what I say."

"Then why," said the seaman fiercely—and his ferocity seemed whimsically out of keeping with his air of lumbering good humour—"does Zillah Copping dwell in your house at Braginton and give it out to all the world that she is your lady, and moreover she is very great with child."

Henry Elizabeth was knocked all of a heap by the man's statement, and his face showed his astonishment.

"Zillah Copping lives in my house?" he repeated, wondering if he had heard aright what the man had said.

Tobias Flood nodded.

"She lives in your house, and her brother with her, and the jack parson with the pair of them, and they give it out boldly that she is married to you and has been these many months, and her brother rules the manor and its lands in your name, and in the name of the heir that is openly at hand."

Henry Elizabeth felt as if he had been hit by a sledge-hammer. He had been so busy and brisk in his new life, that he had allowed Braginton to drift out of his thoughts. Yet somewhere in a corner of his mind he was conscious of its existence, and he counted, no doubt to see it again, one day or another. But the news of Tobias Flood dumfounded him.

"As God guards you, Tobias Flood," he said, "are you speaking what you believe to be the truth, or are you coming to me with some ale-house tale?"

The ruddy face of Tobias Flood took on a deeper red, as he answered this challenge.

"I am telling you the truth," he said, hotly, "and I have travelled to London to tell it to you. Not for your sake, look you, but for her's. For there is trouble brewing in Braginton."

"What manner of trouble?" Henry Elizabeth asked, emptily.



His head was in a whirl with the seaman's wild story, and he could not bring himself to accept it as a sober statement of fact.

"The smith is not popular with your people," Tobias Flood answered. "He is a greedy spendthrift, that loves money and raises rents right and left to gather it. At first, indeed, the people agreed, for they took parson's word for it that all was true about the marriage. But now that no news comes from you, and things go from bad to worse, they whisper. Soon they will come to grumbling, and from grumbling they will pass to worse, unless they be prevented in time. For it is said pretty openly in Braginton that it looks as if you were no longer alive, and there be those that hint freely their belief that you have been put away by the smith."

Even in the extremity of his bewilderment, Henry Elizabeth could not restrain a snort of laughter at the thought of the smith being big man enough to put him away. But he was plainly shaken by the news.

"I tell you, Master Flood," he said very earnestly, "that I am not a married man, and I should be a sadder man than I am at this minute, if I thought that I were."

He would have said more, but the seaman interrupted him in a raging voice.

"If you are not married," he cried, "do you also deny that you are the father of her child?"

Now this was more than Henry Elizabeth could do with a clear conscience. He had the most vague and shadowy memory of that last drunken night at the smith's house, but he knew very well what his wishes had been ever since he had first cast an eye on the smith's sister, and he had thought to find her lightly compliant and had found her of a most unexpected austerity. He cursed his shifty memory which left that night a drunken muddle. Anything might have happened; he could neither say yea nor nay to such a question.

"There is a matter upon which I cannot answer you," he said slowly. "And I would not admit that you have a right to question me thereon, unless the strange tale you tell me be true. But however it may be, I never promised the wench marriage, and never thought of it."

"Out of your own mouth," said the sailor, "you are proved a villain, and it is plain that you have wronged an honest,

true maid. If you have a drain of decent blood in you, you will set matters right at Braginton, and clear her fair fame."

"I will try and set things right at Braginton," said Henry Elizabeth, with a heavy heart, "as soon as may be."

"The sooner the better," said the sailor, "and the best time is this time. Ride with me this very day to the West, and do right to a good woman."

Henry Elizabeth's vexation at the news he had heard was exasperated by the insistence of the sailor upon the injured innocence of the smith's sister. That was not how he had thought of her in the days of their friendship at Braginton.

"You bring me strange news," he said, "but I do not see why you bring it. What concern of yours is it who abides in Braginton during my absence? What concern of yours is it if I be absent from Braginton? And, yet again, what concern of yours is it how matters may be between me and Zillah Copping?"

"The last of your questions is the first I shall answer," said Tobias Flood. "I love Zillah Copping, and have loved her for this many a long year. But you took her fancy, it seems, because you were a gentleman and wealthy, and I was no more than a poor fisherman, though I would have made an honest woman of her."

"You say that I have done the same," Henry Elizabeth said, angrily. "You cannot quarrel with me for a thing I have done, and also quarrel with me because I have not done it."

"I quarrel with you," said the sailor, doggedly, "because one way or another way, you have done Zillah Copping an ill turn. You have stayed away from Braginton these many months, following your own pleasures and fancies. It is time you turned homewards and made amends."

"You have no right to meddle in my affairs——" Henry Elizabeth began. But Flood interrupted him with a kind of scream.

"I have as good a right to meddle with your affairs," he cried, "as you have to steal my name and use it as a cloak for your cowardice."

Henry Elizabeth stared at his interlocutor in honest amazement.

"Use your name as a cloak?" he asked. "What, in the devil's name, are you talking about?"

"When I took it into my head," said Tobias Flood, slowly, "that it was high time you came home to Braginton, I asked myself where a fine gentleman like you was likely to ride, and the answer that came to me was London. So I promised myself that I would journey to London and see if I could find you there. And on the beginning of my journey I made a halt at Honiton, and spoke with a girl there at an inn, asking her if she had seen such an one as I described you to be. To which she answered quickly, and with a kind of sadness, which made me think that perhaps you had made a fool of her, too, after your wont, that my description tallied with that of Master Tobias Flood, who indeed passed through Honiton in the spring of the year. Then I knew that it was you, and that you were playing a rogue's game, and stealing an honest man's name to hide your roguery."

Even as he spoke, Henry Elizabeth recalled his coming to Honiton, and his adventure with the four Knaves and the fair maid of the inn, which he had never forgotten. He recalled, too, now, what he had long since clean forgotten, the fact that when the fair maid asked him his name, he had given her the first name that came into his head, which happened to be that of Tobias Flood.

"I did use your name," he admitted, "in a thoughtless moment. But I did you no harm in the usage."

"You did me some good," said the seaman, "for it showed me that I was on the right tack, and so I continued my journey till I came to London town."

"How did you find me here?" Henry Elizabeth asked. He was puzzled and troubled by the man's tale, and all the dim and distant things it summoned him to remember.

"You are a fine gentleman," Flood replied, "and fine gentlemen go to court. So I waited in the neighbourhood of the court, sure that I should see you one day or another. And now I have seen you and told you what I came to tell, and now I bid you come back with me to Braginton, and set crooked matters straight."

"You ask me," Henry Elizabeth said slowly, "a thing which I cannot do. I am busy upon a business which brooks no moment of delay and which I am pledged to my neck to under-

take. When I have done what I have to do, I will return to Braginton and set things straight."

Tobias Flood flamed into a red rage and cursed at him, with a command of obscene speech which Henry Elizabeth would never have believed him capable of using. When he had cleared his chest of expletives, the seaman's anger sailed into clearer water.

"Curse you and your business," he said. "You have ruined a sweet creature, and you stand there like a devil and tell me that you have this to do and that to do, before you set her right with her neighbours. God damn you, you base and bloody Braginton; I think I should be a glad man to hang for you."

Even as he spoke he plucked his dirk from its sheath and flung himself with uplifted blade upon Henry Elizabeth, with the very evident intention of ramming some keen inches of steel into his anatomy. But Henry Elizabeth, without moving an inch, took a grip of his right wrist with his left hand, and twisted it till there was no choice but that the bones should break or the knife fall to the ground.

Wherefore the knife fell to the ground, and Henry Elizabeth gave the disarmed man a push which sent him reeling a good way off.

"Listen to me, Master Flood," Henry Elizabeth said, sternly. "Travel back to Devon and tell my people that all is well with me, and that I will be with them when opportunity shall serve. As for the smith and his sister, say that they have my authority to abide in Braginton Manor, and say no more."

Tobias Flood pulled himself together, and picked up his knife which lay upon the ground.

"You ought to ride with me," he said hoarsely. "There is an ill spirit abroad in Braginton."

"If the devil himself were abroad in Braginton," Henry Elizabeth retorted hotly, "I could not ride with you at this present, for I have that to do which must be done immediately. When that is done, I will come to Braginton."

He swung on his heel as he spoke, and went his troubled way, leaving the seaman to his wild thoughts.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LUNDY

**L**UNDY ISLAND lies off the coast of the West Country, smiling like a jewel in fine weather, frowning like the leadstone rock in foul. No more than twelve miles of salt water separate it from the nearest mainland, but those four leagues of changeful waves might be as capacious as the greatest sea in their power of division. Any ignorant Londoner, being told by some traveller from the West that there was such an island, and given its name, and being further informed that it was so close to the shore of which it had once been a portion, would have concluded, if he had troubled to think about the matter at all, that this unimportant island, lying as it were a stone's throw, or to be more precise a gun shot, from the mainland was as much portion and parcel of the realm of England and as much under the jurisdiction of England's sovereign as if it were actually a cape, promontary, or headland of the good county of Cornwall which it neighboured so closely. And in making these assumptions the ignorant citizen of London would blunder greatly.

There were kings of England, with the orb in one hand and the sceptre in the other, who knew very well, and were vexed at the knowledge, that the shadow of the one and the menace of the other meant little or nothing to those that peopled Lundy Island. It was metaphorically no bigger a place than the palm of a man's hand, but within its petty limit it housed an insular spirit that at once aped and defied the spirit of the mother island. There, where it stood wellnigh within hailing distance of Hartland, wellnigh within hailing distance of Clovelly, it was, so to speak, as angry and savage an inimical piece of earth as if it had sunned itself in the blue waters of the Algerine bay. It's history (for it had a history of which

its makers were very proud) was one long record of derision of law, disdain of order, delight in crime. Its placid beach, affable slopes and diminutive valleys had been for time out of mind the theatre of license; the nest of piracy, the stronghold of disorder. Through generation after generation the Lords of Lundy, varying in name occasionally but never in nature, did with gusto all the wickedness that it pleased them to do and lolled the tongue of mockery at their sovereign liege.

On a pleasant day in the ebb tide of autumn a ship came over the water making with a fair wind in the direction of Lundy. The watchers on Lundy soon sighted her. She was not a very big ship, and so far the less enticing; but on the other hand she was not a very little ship and the citizens of the kingdom of Lundy were worldly-wise enough to know that small caskets often shut in great treasure. The appearance of the ship indeed roused little more than languid interest in the island, for the lord of the island was far away from his domain on business of his own, business which he always kept strictly to himself: and in his absence his lieutenants doubted whether the distant vessel would be worth snapping at. But the languid interest quickened when the distant vessel grew nearer and when the watchers noted that she was heading her course direct for Lundy. This was so unusual an action on the part of an alien ship that many a spectator of the ship's course took it for granted that it carried their returning lord and troubled their heads no more about it. But when it came within the distance of the pitch of a biscuit the observers saw that it was no such matter.

For it was plain now to the observers on Lundy that the little ship which had wheeled into their ken was making signals to their island, and that those signals being interpreted, announced that the vessel wished to parley. This was a sufficiently unusual event at Lundy to arouse at least a measure of interest. Vessels came thither that were expected, and that had no need to signal. Vessels drifted there and were conveyed there against their will, and for these again there was no question of signalling. But here was a vessel of unfamiliar trim, a vessel that was not flying the island colours, who yet was announcing herself as most eager to have speech with authority upon the island. Authority upon the island scratched its head and decided to respond to the petition.

By this time the vessel had come to anchor within a furlong of the shore of Lundy and was dipping easily to the slight swell of the water and the slight sigh of the wind. The lieutenant of the Lord of Lundy put off in a boat manned by a half-dozen of the grisliest ruffians that made the garrison of Lundy what it was. It did not take long for those sinewy arms to urge the boat across the gap of tranquil ocean till it came to pause with poised oars alongside of the inquisitive vessel, and could read painted on its prow the name, "The Queen of Hearts."

The man sitting in the stern-sheets of the boat and in command of her, bawled out an angry demand to know what the new-comer wanted. There was a big fresh-faced man standing at the ship's prow, red-headed and red-bearded, whose Christian names were Henry Elizabeth. He leaned over the bulwark and addressed the man in the boat.

"Our captain is dead of a sudden," he said, with as much sadness in his voice as he could command. "He came to his death in France and in his last hours he besought us to have him buried in Lundy, which is the favour we come to beseech."

The man in the boat looked up at Henry Elizabeth with a frown.

"Why did your captain wish to be buried here?" he growled. Henry Elizabeth's manner was as sweet as the other's was sour.

"It seems," he explained, "that he was born on this same island and wished to end where he began. Poor Captain Jack." Here Henry Elizabeth drew the cuff of his jerkin across his eye as one that sought to staunch commanding tears. "If I had my will he should sleep at Paul's or Westminster, for he was as good a man as ever lived and as true a seaman, and one that gathered in this same hold as pretty a cargo as man might wish to numerate."

The man in the boat seemed more interested in the cargo than in the virtues of the departed Captain Jack.

"Of what nature is that cargo whereof you speak?" he asked. Henry Elizabeth answered him with a great air of innocence.

"We carry a matter of spice," he replied, "and a matter of ivory and may be a pinch or two of gold dust which should

serve our turn in Plymouth. And if you will grant our petition we will be willing to make you up a parcel of our commodities to pay you for your grace."

"Bring me aboard," said the man in the boat gruffly, "and let me have a squint at your gear."

He climbed aboard with the aid of a rope followed by a brace of his men, while the others in the boat kept at ease and surveyed the ship with a cruel scrutiny that amused Henry Elizabeth, though he feigned to be wholly unaware of it. He welcomed the man on board with great suavity, conducted him to the Captain's cabin and showed him where the coffin lay clamped and fast. This had little interest for the man from the island, but a scrutiny of the ship's cargo list and a peep into the hold seemed to afford him an infinity of satisfaction.

"Take your man ashore," he said with more cheerfulness than he had hitherto shown, "and bury him as you please. I will send one with you to secure you a welcome, and in the meantime I will look after your ship for you and see that she comes to no hurt."

Henry Elizabeth accepted this offer with a simple readiness, and was equally compliant when the man informed him that it was one of the rules of the stronghold of Lundy that no strangers should visit it carrying any kind of weapon. He cheerfully unshipped his hanger from his girdle and bade the rest of his fellows do the like. With equal readiness he showed the islander the small display of guns which the ship's crew carried for their defence, and was even so further obliging as to hand over the key of the powder-room and the spirit-room, both of which the islander accepted with much alacrity. Thereafter the ship's boats were lowered with Henry Elizabeth and the coffin in the first in the company of the island's deputy, and the rest of the crew, save six, twenty men in all, in the others, and in a few moments they were rowing briskly across the smooth water towards the shelving beach of Lundy. As for the boat load of islanders they climbed aboard the ship with the air of men who take possession of a prize.

Henry Elizabeth as he travelled affected a gravity which he conceived to be appropriate to the occasion. He allowed himself to be simply eloquent concerning the memories of his deceased commander, whom he assured the islander that escorted him to have been as good and stout-hearted a seaman



as ever lived. The islander listened to his encomiums with a sour smile which Henry Elizabeth affected to accept as a proof of the tenderest sympathy.

When they came into the shallow water below the beach they noted that their coming had attracted a number of the inhabitants from their dwellings, who were standing together on the shore watching them. As the first boat, in which was Henry Elizabeth, scraped the shingle, the fellow that was in the bow swung himself into the surf and ran forward towards his fellows to tell them what was in wind, leaving Henry Elizabeth and his companions to beach their boats and disembark their cargo. When half-a-dozen of them had hoisted the coffin on to their shoulders the islander came back to them and bade them follow his lead to the church, which lay a little way off on the summit of the hill.

The fellow did not seem inclined to be communicative, and Henry Elizabeth guessed that his surliness sprang from the fact that he would rather have been engaged in plundering the ship than in shepherding a party of silly sailors to the church. But Henry Elizabeth spoke him fair and seemed so smooth and innocent and good-humoured that he managed to soften the fellow's mood sufficiently to coax a little speech out of him.

To Henry Elizabeth asking him how he liked the life on the island the fellow replied that it was an easy life enough for a time, as there was always abundance of good victuals to eat and good liquor to drink, and it seemed, too, that the buccaneers were by no means deprived of the pleasures of female society. Henry Elizabeth asked him how they came by the fine eatables and drinkables.

"Why," said the fellow with a villainous sideways leer at Henry Elizabeth, "those that pass by in ship to northwards are so wonderful fond of us that they must needs make us rich presents of meat and wine and even money and in no wise will be denied the doing us so much kindness." He added, after a pause, "You yourselves will find your hearts move you in the like fashion or I am much mistaken."

Henry Elizabeth gave no sign of understanding the menace in the fellow's suggestion.

"Yours seems to be a fine kind of life," he commented.

The man gave a grunt by way of response, which seemed

to assert that it certainly was a fine kind of life and that there could be no mistake on that point.

"I am wondering," said Henry Elizabeth, with a great air of simplicity, "if it oe a way of life that I should find to my liking."

The man gave a grunt by way of response, which seemed "Ours is a sharing trade," he said, "wherefore the more hands the less loot, if you take my meaning."

He had by this time so completely cast off any pretence of being other than what he actually was that Henry Elizabeth knew very well that the fellow regarded him and his companions as being already in the trap and not worthy any pains of concealment.

"My friend," he said with an air of great wisdom, "if you pushed that argument too far you would come in the end to be but a band with no more than a single member. So you were like the man that reduced his horse's provender, little by little, to a single straw, whereupon the horse incontinently died. Your single man would have all the wealth he could command, indeed, but boast no more than a single pair of hands wherewith to command it."

A grin softened the sullen features of the pirate as he listened to Henry Elizabeth.

"You are nct such a fool as you look," he said gruffly, and Henry Elizabeth inwardly blessed him for the truth of his comment. "I don't say that we should be unwilling to welcome such a limber lad as yourself into our company, but we don't want to drown our drink, if you take my meaning." Henry Elizabeth nodded pleasantly and chuckled.

"May be you would take me," he whispered, "and may be you wouldn't care for all my shipmates."

The man nodded.

"That's my idea of it," he said. "I don't speak for the captain. I speak only for myself, but that's my idea of it."

By this time the little train of men had rounded the slope of the hill and found themselves on the open space upon which the church of the island stood. It was a simple building, with a rugged tower and a barnlike main body, and its native greyness had been intensified by time and the elements. It looked disconsolate enough, and its circumambient graveyard with its scattered headstones seemed yet more desolate. Its

desolation was too familiar to the island guide to impress his toughened nature with any touch of solemnity. It only aroused in Henry Elizabeth an amused sense of contrast between the dreary place itself and the plans and fancies that were jiggling in his brain. He smiled cheerfully at his ill-favoured companion and nodded his head.

"I think we understand each other," he whispered, and emphasised his whisper with a portentous wink. The ugly ruffian grinned.

"Do not vex your head about your fellows," he advised. "You are a stout morsel and I will see to it that you come to no harm."

Henry Elizabeth thanked him warmly in an undertone for his consideration, and by this time the whole party came to a halt in front of the grim forbidding little chapel. Henry Elizabeth, glancing about him, noticed carelessly a wilderness of untended graves among which one seemed to be a little better respected than the rest, having a few autumn flowers on it and a border of evergreens. He thought vaguely of the kind thoughts that may hide in the hearts of savage men. The guide by this time had left his side and, producing a key from his jerkin, inserted it into the ancient lock of the oaken door and swung it in upon its hinges. The ruffian invited the strangers to enter.

"We have no chaplain here," he explained to Henry Elizabeth. "He is away on other business and you must needs do your mummerly for yourselves. You will find a Bible on the desk and may do your best with it. Then you will find spades and picks in the out-house at the back. No need to dig more than a single grave. We here at Lundy mostly bury our dead in the sea."

The company, headed by Henry Elizabeth, slowly filed into the grim sanctuary, and those that carried the coffin set it solemnly down upon the dank pavement of the place in front of the desolate-looking altar. While they were thus occupied their guide quitted them and might have been seen by anyone that cared to follow his movements to resume with rapid strides that quickly increased to a run the path along which the procession had travelled; but neither Henry Elizabeth nor any of his companions had time or thought to bestow upon his conduct. In the twinkling of a single instant half-a-dozen hands produced

from the slack of half-a-dozen breeches as many serviceable crowbars which were in the succeeding instant applied to the nails that kept down the lid of the coffin. The men worked without any thought for their seeming sacrilegious conduct so briskly and nimbly that in a very few seconds the coffin-lid was taken off and laid hurriedly upon the damp floor of the chapel and the whole of the small band of seamen immediately huddled around the thus rudely violated box.

But no semblance of mortality lay within to rebuke them for their rudeness. In the space which was framed to enclose the last form of battered humanity there lay a well-arranged mass of weapons, pistols, hangers, cutlasses, and hatchets. Twenty brawny hands plunged into the receptacle and drew back armed with some deadly weapon that seemed the more deadly from the energy with which it was wielded and the vigour of the muscles of the wielding arms. Henry Elizabeth garnished his belt with a brace of pistols and a knife as large as a butcher's whittle, and caught in his hand a broad sword that would for size and weight have served the turn of Guy of Warwick. Thus in the winking of an eyelid the one-and-twenty helpless and credulous mariners who had so guilelessly confided themselves to the clemency of the pirate of Lundy, were transformed into a force of well-armed and desperate men who would have followed Henry Elizabeth to the siege of London if he had invited them to that course, and who showed by their eager faces and gestures that they regarded the subjugation of Lundy as a very trifling adventure. Left to themselves they would in all probability have poured headlong down the hill and fallen hot-foot and hot-hand upon the pirate settlement, but Henry Elizabeth was not at all for having his cherished scheme belittled in such a fashion, gulped and bolted as it were, rather than duly chewed, masticated and tasted.

"Patience, comrades," he ordered, "patience. I want to savour this jest to the full. Let them come and seek us, thinking us at their mercy. Let them so think till we take them unawares. Cover me those weapons under your sea cloaks and let us linger awhile as if we were indeed giving earth to earth."

Henry Elizabeth's recruits had far too great a respect for his strength, regard for his intelligence—it pleased Henry Elizabeth to discover how intelligent they esteemed him—and

affection for his purpose to do other than obey his command. With their sea cloaks duly drooping from their shoulders they seemed no more than an inoffensive group of mourners. Henry Elizabeth nodded approval. He moved a little way to the wall of the churchyard and looked over it down the hill side to the road below. What he saw seemed to amuse him, for he returned to his companions with a cheerful grin on his countenance.

"You will not have long to wait," he said gaily. "Our good friends, the islanders, are as keen to come to us as we are eager to come to them. Mind you, now, that you show no sign of suspicion, and that no man lifts a hand until I give the word."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIGHT BY THE CHURCH

**A**T their leisure along the road, and thence up the zigzag path that led to the church, came an armed rabble of the pirates, with the fellow that had been the shipmen's guide at their head. All of them were armed and made no concealment of their armament. They were in their own dominion, tyrants of their island, wherein at least dissimulation was one of the few vices they had no need to practise. As they leisurely mounted the hill-side their progress was cheered by the view of the group of helpless seamen gathered in attitudes of mournful respect around their comrade's grave.

When the pirates had come to the churchyard gate and had begun to pass through it, Henry Elizabeth felt that it would be an idle affectation to pretend to ignore their approach. Wherefore he turned from the side of his fellows and moved with an air of good-humour, tempered with melancholy, towards the rascal that had been his guide. As for his companions they huddled together each with as great an air of despondency as he could conveniently command, and waited for the word to fall from their leader's lips which was to tell them that the fun might begin. That word was not spoken immediately.

The pirate lieutenant was the first to speak and his voice was loud with menace.

"Have you fools done with your folly?" he shouted. Henry Elizabeth answered him very politely.

"Pray do not speak so harshly, good sir, of what we have been about, for indeed it was no folly, but very sound wisdom."

"Call it how you please," the fellow replied, "I hope that you have done with it, for I have no more time to waste upon you."

"Indeed," Henry Elizabeth explained, "we have not quite done our job but we hope to do so satisfactorily, and that very speedily."

"If you mean that you have not filled in your grave," said the pirate with an ugly smile, "I can tell you that you may spare your pains, for I think we shall find your friend some company. Come, young man, if you are to serve under our colours stand of one side and leave me to deal with those numskulls."

He turned as he spoke to the rogues behind him, who were handling their pistols impatiently with a significance that there was no mistaking, and was plainly at the point to command them to fire upon a batch of helpless men.

Now all this while Henry Elizabeth had been thinking very busily, yet, as he remembered afterwards, not upon what might have been expected to dwell in his thoughts. These were not of Ludovica, nor of his enemy, nor of the purpose for which he had come thither, nor of the peril in which, for all his carefulness, he and his fellow-adventurers were set. They centred solely upon a sense of satisfaction in the fact that he had learned in London how to shoot, that his hand was steady and that his aim was good, and that the scoundrel who stood opposite him at so little distance off, made a mark which even inexperience could scarcely miss. He felt pleasantly self-confident as he watched the evil mouth opening for the order to destroy. But that order was never given. There was a loud report, a spurt of flame, a cloud of white, sour-smelling smoke. The pirate flung up his hands, swayed a little to one side, and then pitched forward heavily on to his face and lay quite still upon the ground.

Now this was the first time that Henry Elizabeth had ever killed a man, had ever come near to killing a man. He had indeed in bouts of fisticuffs at Braginton, time and again, battered his opponent within an inch of his life as the saying went, which only meant that he had given his antagonist a sound drubbing or delivered him a shrewd blow that had sent him temporarily to sleep. But here was another business done in very bitter earnest, and Henry Elizabeth heeded it no more than a snap of the fingers. It was kill or be killed, and the target was a foul villain who would have slain helpless folk.

"Shoot, lads, shoot," shouted Henry Elizabeth, as he thrust

His reeking pistol back into his belt and plucked another from its place. He had fired again and brought down another man before his companions, for all their alertness, were ready to follow his example. Yet they were so quick that the pirates had barely time to realise that two of their number had been shot down in as many seconds, before the ship's company began to open fire on them. Instead of a company of silly seamen, unarmed and helpless, the men of Lundy were confronted by a band of sturdy fighters well provided with firearms, which they were emptying with telling effect upon their enemies. The treacherous islanders, taken wholly unawares, were reduced to half their number before any one of them was able to return a shot, and when the seamen, having fired their volley, drew their cutlasses and charged, as many of the pirates as were still standing took to their heels and ran down the hill towards their settlement with the crew hot in their pursuit.

The islanders ran in fear, but their pursuers raced in rage and soon caught up with them. When some of the fugitives had been cut down the remainder turned and sought for a moment to make a stand, and then seeing the uselessness of the attempt flung down their weapons and bawled for mercy. Thereupon the seamen, uncoiling lengths of stout roap from their bodies, fastened their prisoners securely and led them in triumph towards the shore and the huts from which the startled womankind of the island were issuing in affright.

Henry Elizabeth gave a cock of his eye to seaward and saw with satisfaction how a boat with a pair of oars was making shoreward from the Queen of Hearts with a black-haired, familiar companion in the stern-sheets. It was clear that his plan for the ship had been as successful as his plan for the island and his heart swelled with pride.

"The world is mine to do as I like with," he thought. "If I lose in love I win all the rest."

No thunder grumbled from the shining sky to warn the boaster of the mutability of things.



## CHAPTER X

### FAILURE

**T**HE Knave of Spades stepped ashore and greeted his leader with a smile.

"All is well," he reported. "The drugged wine did the Whitefriars trick for the swinkers and they lie under hatches in irons. If it had not been for your majesty's commands"—the fraternity had long insisted on hailing Henry Elizabeth as a King of the Pack—"I would have bundled them overboard to sleep out their sleep in four fathoms of water."

Henry Elizabeth smiled grimly.

"We must save them," he answered, "for hemp at Bristol, together with these gentry." He turned to his prisoners as he spoke and questioned, "Which of you is now the head man of this place?"

A lean, dingy, yellow-faced fellow declared himself. Henry Elizabeth bade him step forward and apart from the rest. Then he ordered the Knave of Spades to herd the others in one of the huts and to assure the women that no harm was intended them. While this was doing he remained alone with the islander.

"Where is the Master of Lundy?" he said to this fellow. He had a freshly-loaded pistol in his hand, which served to emphasize the question.

"Sir John Marisco is abroad," said the man, "for the mending of his health, which will scarcely be bettered by the news of this day's burly."

"I grieve to hear of Sir John's case," said Henry Elizabeth, "but it is not with him that I am concerned. Where is the Master of Lundy? Where is Sir Matthew Favill?"

The fellow darted a shrewd glance at his questioner and saw that he knew what he knew.

"You must ask a wiser man than I," he answered, "and there

is no wiser than I in all the island. Sir Matthew came here some months ago. He seemed in a mighty hurry and made but a short stay. That is the last we have seen or heard of him."

"When Sir Matthew Favill came here," said Henry Elizabeth, fingering the butt of his pistol as if he yearned to use it, "he was accompanied by four gentlemen and a lady. You see that I speak with knowledge. Was it not so?"

The man, watching anxiously the manner in which Henry Elizabeth's fingers fondled the pistol, answered hurriedly that it was so indeed.

"Of these four gentlemen," Henry Elizabeth continued, "one remained on the island. Three departed with Sir Matthew and the lady on the ship that brought them thither. Is not that so?"

Again the questioned man nodded his head. He was evidently made uneasy by the speaker's knowledge.

"I can tell you the names of the three that put out to sea," said Henry Elizabeth. "Toby Jackaway and the brothers Inch. Let them pass. It is the fourth, he that remained on shore, that concerns me. Bring me to Philip Harrington."

To Henry Elizabeth's surprise the fellow's face turned of a ghastly pallor, and all of a sudden he flung himself on his knees at his captor's feet, wringing clasped hands towards him. Once and twice his lips twitched horrible before he could sufficiently command his passion of fear as to speak articulately. Then his speech took the form of clamorous protestations and entreaty.

"As there is a God in Heaven," he shrieked, "I had naught to do with it. Naught, I swear by the bones of all the blessed saints. I could not have prevented it if I would, but I had no act nor part in it."

A fear as cold as that which convulsed the suppliant chilled the young man's blood. He seemed to know already the answer to the question which he had to ask, and nausea fouled his throat.

"Where is Philip Harrington?" he asked, in a voice that sounded terrible enough to the grovelling wretch upon the ground, but that sounded no better than an empty groan of despair to him that uttered it.

"I had naught to do with it," the fellow began again, but

quavered into a change as Henry Elizabeth pointed his pistol. "You who know so much ought to know the rest. But I had naught to do with it."

Henry Elizabeth clapped the muzzle of the pistol to the forehead of the grovelling wretch.

"Where is Philip Harrington?" he asked again, and there was that in his voice that called for a plain answer.

"Philip Harrington lies in the churchyard," the man said heavily. Somehow it seemed to Henry Elizabeth that he had heard the answer long before the man delivered it. "You might have noted the grave as we came up the path, being all so prettily decked with posies."

Henry Elizabeth recalled with a pang the flowery grave he had heedlessly noted so short a while ago.

"Tell me what happened," he said sternly. He felt like a banished man.

The kneeler, watching his face eagerly, made all haste to obey.

"It was towards the end of March," he said, that the ship came here with a fair wind from France. I was signalled to come aboard and I went aboard, and there I found Sir Matthew and three friends of his, and one gentleman whom I had learnt to be Master Philip Harrington, who seemed not to be in the friendship of Sir Matthew. Also there was a lady."

Henry Elizabeth seemed to be standing on that cursed deck. He could picture all the faces. Matthew Favill and his three satellites, the beautiful woman, the fair brave face of the prisoner.

"Go on," he said.

"There was little speech on board ship," the man continued, "but there was some speech. Sir Matthew spoke Master Harrington fair, assuring him of kindly treatment, promising him that he should never want for anything while he abode on Lundy Island. I knew not what he meant, but I thought then and the young man thought, and for sure the woman thought that Sir Matthew meant well in his words."

Henry Elizabeth gave a heavy sigh. In the autumn sunlight he reviewed that scene of early spring and found it bitterly pitiful.

"Then," the man went on, "Master Harrington and the lady had some few private words together and he held her hand

and kissed it and they clung together for a brief moment, but Sir Matthew separated them, saying that time pressed, and so he and Master Harrington got into the pinnace and we rowed them to the island, the lady leaning over the ship's side and she and Master Harrington gazing at each other steadfastly so long as their eyes could see each other's faces. From the time of leaving the vessel Sir Matthew spoke no word to his companion and his companion spoke no word to him. But for all their silence there was, as it seemed to me, a good understanding between them, as there would be between men who had come to an agreement after enmity."

The man paused. "Go on," said Henry Elizabeth.

"When we ran the boat on shore Sir Matthew and Master Harrington landed and walked still in silence up the path to the church. Sir Matthew led Master Harrington into the churchyard. I was close at their heels as my lord wished, but I knew nothing of his thoughts and had no part in his deeds."

"Go on," said Henry Elizabeth.

"When they came into the churchyard Master Harrington looked about him in surprise, and as he did so Sir Matthew drew his dagger and stabbed him straight to the heart. Master Harrington stood for a moment and looked steadfastly at Sir Matthew, who smiled back at him, and then the young man fell at his feet and was dead. Then Sir Matthew bent over the body and drew the rings off its fingers, and with his still bloody dagger he hacked away a lock of the young gentleman's hair. He turned to me and bade me dig a grave that day and bury the dead man, and to keep the grave exceedingly fair with flowers and shrubs against his coming again. Then he went within and put the rings and the lock of hair into a small box, and he wrapped the box in parchment and sealed it and wrote upon it, 'For the Lady Favill when she cometh here again.' And thereafter he went his way and I rowed him back to the ship, and I could hear him say to the lady that all was well with her friend. And since that day I have not seen him again nor heard from him."

The man's eyes stared glassily past Henry Elizabeth and it was plain that the horror of the scene he had been describing had burned all its details on his memory.

"What has become of this packet?" asked Henry Elizabeth in the voice of a man that has lost the world.

"It is in the strong box in the great house," said the man, and Sir Matthew gave me the key of it with order that when he should warn me of his coming with his wife I was to take it out and lay it upon the table in the entrance hall. But, as I have said, I have not heard from him from that day to this, and as I said, and say, I had no act nor part in the murder."

It seemed to Henry Elizabeth to matter very little whether the man were speaking truth or no in this regard. What mattered was the tale he had been told and the tale he had to tell. He beckoned to the Knave of Spades, who had returned from his task.

"Take this fellow under guard," he said, "and see that he finds and brings hither to me the packet of which he speaks."

Then Henry Elizabeth turned away and stood silent until the man returned with his guard and the packet was put into his hand with the superscription even as the pirate had described. Henry Elizabeth thrust the packet into the breast of his doublet. He then made the man sit down by him on an upturned boat and began to ply him with questions cunningly.

"I take it," he began, "that you are but a common sort of fellow and one that knew nothing of Sir Matthew's purposes?"

The man reddened as if he had received a blow, and his questioner perceived that he had a great conceit of himself.

"Not so," he answered, and supported his denial with an oath. "Sir Matthew and I were ever cater-cousins and he never cared to shield a secret from me."

"That were a good hearing," said Henry Elizabeth, "if I could give it belief. But you have the hang-dog look of a malignant liar. However, we shall soon see if your fine words butter any parsnips."

As he spoke he placed his pistol ostentatiously across his knees. The pirate eyed the speaker and the weapon anxiously. Henry Elizabeth continued:

"You are an enemy to the realm and a flouter of the Queen's majesty, here represented by me. If you can give me any sure clue or even strong hint which may bring me to speech with Sir Matthew Favill I will spare your life at this present and give you word that I will do all I can to save you from

the gallows at Bristol. But if you cannot, why, then, as I am master here in the Queen's stead, I will hang you out of hand with great gratification and no small advantage to the habitable world."

The pirate looked sullenly at Henry Elizabeth and saw very clearly that he meant what he said.

"If I tell you anything that I may know or think I know," he faltered, "how am I to be sure that you will protect me against the anger of Sir Matthew Favill hereafter?"

"If you can help to bring me into Sir Matthew's company," Henry Elizabeth said decisively, "you need trouble your head no further as to Sir Matthew's conduct. You may take surety from me that he will never molest you."

There was something in the assurance of Henry Elizabeth's speech, as also in the immediate menace of the gibbet, which had the effect of stiffening the islander into resolution.

"If Sir Matthew were in Paris," he said, "you would be most likely to find him, or news of him,—supposing you had the right to seek or the right to ask,—in the Rue de la Ferronière, at the House of the Three Swans."

"You are very obliging," replied Henry Elizabeth, in a voice which made the man shiver, "but it sticks in my gizzard that Sir Matthew is more likely to be in London than elsewhere at these times, and I have no mind to waste my time looking for him in Paris. So if you cannot give me the clue to his headquarters in London, I very much fear me that we shall part company for good and all."

"Stay," said the pirate desperately. "Why will your worship be so quick. When Sir Matthew is in London I have reason to believe that he hides in the dwelling of a certain Squire of Highgate, one Master Lillingworth, who is very much under Sir Matthew's thumb. More than this I could not tell you to save my neck."

"If it be true," said Henry Elizabeth gravely, "it shall prove enough to save your neck."

He noted as he spoke that his prisoner did not show any change of countenance. It seemed possible that the man might, if but for once, be speaking the truth. He turned aside and stared upon the sea. In the near distance he beheld the sails of the sister ship that was coming from Bristol to hold the island and bring his prisoners to the Queen's justice.

## CHAPTER XI

### LORD ROEHAMPTON

**L**ONDON seemed a very dreary city when he entered it again on a dark autumn day that was wasteful of rain and prodigal of wind. As he was buffeted without by the struggle of air and water, so he was troubled within by two contesting terrors, the terror of the thing he had to do and the terror of the result of the deed. Of his own part of the misery of which he was the messenger he did not make little because he could not make too much of it, so being at his best a simple honest fellow he made nothing of it, by shutting it stubbornly out of his thoughts. He carried in his bosom that fatal packet which was like to break a woman's heart. Darkly he reflected that he had hoped to ride into London with a young man by his side; that he had hoped to say to a radiant woman, "Here is the man you love," and to say to himself thereafter, "Restored to your arms by the man that loves you." And now all that he could offer to that waiting, longing woman was a little handful of trinkets and a blood-smirched wisp of hair.

It was his only shred of consolation to remember that at least he had not failed in his faith. The tragedy of Lundy had happened before ever he had looked with wonder upon the Lady of the Forge.

Henry Elizabeth rode straight to Master Gallop's dwelling and found his friendly host within. The jester greeted him warmly, and eagerly asked for news.

"Lundy is part of the Queen's dominion again," said Henry Elizabeth. "That is the best of my news and all that I am free to impart, for the rest concerns another and may be shared with no one."

He dropped into a chair as he spoke, and Master Gallop,

ceasing to question, did better and wiser in producing flagon and goblets, and giving Henry Elizabeth to drink. When the cups were emptied Henry Elizabeth turned to his host.

"Could you," he said, "convey a message to my Lord of Roehampton, entreating him to give me audience this very day and if possible this very hour."

If Master Gallop was surprised at his friend's demand he was too discreet to show any sign of surprise.

"I will wait upon his lordship myself and that instantly," he responded. "I have a good standing with him and I know that he likes you well, so if his lordship be by any means at leisure I am very sure that he will give you cheerful welcome."

After assuring himself that every provision was made for the comfort of his friend, Master Gallop quitted the room on his errand, and Henry Elizabeth was left to such meditations as he might choose to indulge in. But as he was not over given to thinking when he might be doing he employed his rest and leisure otherwise. He was hungry: therefore he ate. He was thirsty: therefore he drank, knowing very well that a man who has a difficult business before him does well to fortify himself with meat and drink.

He had but newly come to the end of his meal and was seated before the fire knocking his project into shape, when the door of the room opened, and, turning his head, he saw that Master Gallop had returned and that he had not returned alone. A young man was in his company and the young man was Lord Roehampton.

Henry Elizabeth sprang to his feet and greeted his visitor with some hurried thanks for his condescension, which my lord waived amiably of one side.

"Master Braginton," he said, "when our good friend here told me that you had an instant wish to see me, I felt sure from my knowledge of you that the reason must be a good one and that the response should be immediate. Wherefore behold me, very eager to know in what manner I can serve you."

"My lord," said Henry Elizabeth earnestly, "I should not have troubled your case were not the matter urgent."

My lord gave him a courtly bow.

"If you have any need of me," he said, "be confident that I



am very much at your service. Do I guess rightly that your urgency concerns some honourable conflict?"

"My lord," said Henry Elizabeth gravely, "I hope to deal this night with a villain who is my enemy, and the Queen's enemy, and the enemy of all true thoughts and things. It is my heart's wish to be his executioner, yet I would never dispatch him, if heaven be pleased to grant me so much favour, without the strictest observance of the code of combat. And because this man is the Queen's enemy as well as mine I would fain have you for a witness of what may befall, in order that you who stand high in the Queen's favour may report of me that I carried myself in this matter as a gentleman and her servant should."

Lord Roehampton listened with a thoughtful face.

"Who is your adversary?" he asked.

"Sir Matthew Favill," said Henry Elizabeth. My lord seemed to make an effort of memory.

"The name sounds familiar to me," he said. "Indeed I think that I recall the man. I believe that I encountered him in Paris."

"He has lived for the most part abroad," said Henry Elizabeth. "He frequented courts. It is my hope that he will frequent them no more."

Lord Roehampton looked meditative.

"You say that this Favill is the Queen's enemy. How far then are you free to deal with him of your own hand? The Queen's enemies should be brought to the Queen's justice."

"In that regard, my lord," Henry Elizabeth replied, "I stand secure. I have the Queen's freedom to handle this matter after my own fashion. But if you will accompany me you will be able to bear witness that I have acted as a man of honour should act."

"I think," said Lord Roehampton, "that Master Braginton is not and never can be in need of such a witness."

Henry Elizabeth gravely inclined his head.

"Our encounter takes place to-night," he said, "as soon as it is dark. The place is somewhere near Highgate."

Lord Roehampton smiled a little ruefully.

"My dear friend," he said, "I will confess to you that I had idler plans for this night, with women in them, and music, and a little shifting of gold pieces over the Devil's Books.

But to please you in such a business I would let the sweetest mistress that ever snared sing herself to sleep with disconsolate ditties."

"I would not come between your lordship and your pleasures——" Henry Elizabeth began, but Roehampton, quickly conscious of the gravity in his voice, stopped him with a raised hand of protest.

"If I seemed to speak lightly," he said, "I did not think lightly, I promise you. I can gladly give the go-by to a purple pleasure or so for the higher gratification of being in your company and rendering you some small service. What is your hour tonight? Where shall we meet? Will you pass your time at my house till the date of your enterprise?"

"I thank your lordship," said Henry Elizabeth, "but I have much to do between now and then. If your lordship will meet me a-horseback at Charing Cross with some half-dozen of your people at eight of the clock I shall be your debtor. By the almanack it will be moonlight then, and so no need for torches, but I would have your people be well weaponed, for indeed we do not ride upon a party of pleasure."

"Master Braginton," said the young earl, with the bright laugh that so well became his beauty, "I and mine will come to the tryst armed to the chin like Arthur's paladins. So it shall be against you to provide the adventure you promise."

Therewith my lord took his departure, having, as he said, to play a game of tennis with Mr. Secretary's Canonbury's son Jocelyn, and after his lordship's departure Henry Elizabeth quitted the house and directed his steps towards Whitefriars.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE LODGE

**A**T eight o'clock that evening Henry Elizabeth waited at Charing Cross in the company of half-a-dozen horsemen. The four Knaves formed the bulk of the little troop; the fifth was an honest rogue from the purlicus of Whitefriars who had been recruited from a boozing-ken and sobered under a pump because he happened to be the man in the current thieves' calendar who was best acquainted with Highgate and its neighbourhood. The sixth man was no other than Master Gallop himself. To him Henry Elizabeth had deemed it but decent to tell something of his past experiences and of his evening expedition. Thereupon Master Gallop had besought most earnestly to be allowed to bear a part in the affair. He was none too old, he protested, to straddle a nag or port a sword with any scarecrow from Whitefriars, to say nothing of my lord of Roehampton. The jester was so importunate in his petitioning and so earnest in asserting his fitness that Henry Elizabeth, weighing how much he owed him, and remembering his ever-present discretion, delighted him by consenting.

The night was sharply cold, with a bright moon stemming the cloudy heavens and carpeting the gaunt trees and outlining the austere eaves with whiteness.

There was little or nothing of a wind, but the air was briskly chilly, which prompted the horsemen, betimes at their tryst, to move hither and thither to keep themselves and their animals warm during the waiting. They had not long to wait, however. Another quarter of an hour had not fallen from the clock before there came a clattering of horses' hooves along the Strand, and Lord Roehampton rode up and joined the waiting party, followed by half-a-dozen of stout, well-armed fellows, bearing his badge.

The two leaders exchanged brief greeting. Then the whole

body set off at a brisk trot towards the north. Lord Roehampton rode at the head of the host with Henry Elizabeth at his right hand and Master Gallop at his left. Behind Lord Roehampton's men rode in a bunch together on one side of the road, and Henry Elizabeth's levy of adventurers did the like on the other. The roads were for the most part deserted owing to the sharpness of the season and the lateness of the hour, and when the company came into open country they seemed for a time, in the full moonlight, to be traversing a white desert.

When the cavalcade came to the place where the ground began to swell into the slope of Highgate Hill the Knave of Spades detached himself from the rear-guard in company with that dweller in Whitefriars who was justly celebrated for his knowledge of north London, and these two now rode at the head of the party acting as their guides.

There was little interchange of speech among the riders. Henry Elizabeth was taciturn, saying nothing of his own accord and giving nothing but the briefest responses to any utterances of his companions, who soon, seeing his mood, yielded to it readily enough and were presently as silent as he. The remainder of the riders, deeming it expedient to follow the example of their leaders, held their peace save for an occasional whisper, from the start.

The company rode up the hill and down of the other side and so into a somewhat wooded country with rare signs of habitation. All of a sudden the guide laid a hand upon the arm of the Knave of Spades and pointed with an unsteady finger in a direction a little ahead of their course, whence a slender column of grey smoke could be seen ascending to the autumnal-sky, while through the encircling trees the light of a window flickered like a distant jewel.

The riders came to halt just before a turn in the road which, as their guide assured them, would afford a view of the house.

"There is a lodge at the gate," he said, "and the lodge is occupied day and night by an armed man. The lodge has a belfry and on the least suspicion the bell would be sounded and give the alarm to the house."

"The bell shall not sound to-night," said Henry Elizabeth quietly.

He swung himself from his horse as he spoke. There was a fence by the road and a thicket beyond. Henry Elizabeth leaned against the fence, and drawing from the pockets of his riding coat a couple of rolls of soft thick cloth, proceeded to bind and swathe these about his riding boots with great care and precision. When he had done he turned to Lord Roehampton with a smile.

"I am something of a heavy man," he said, "but I have a sportman's nimble tread, and shod like this I can trip it as noiseless as a kitten."

He proved the truth of his statement by moving without a sound a little to and fro on the hard ground. He assured himself that he had about him all that he needed, his pistols and his dagger. He unshipped his sword and handed it to Lord Roehampton.

"Hold this for me, my dear lord, until my return," he said. "It would but hinder me on this present business."

Lord Roehampton took the sword in silence. All the riders were now standing by their horses with their hands on the animals' muzzles to prevent them from neighing. Henry Elizabeth swung round and went on his way.

The highroad was white with the moonlight, but Henry Elizabeth kept well within the shadow of the hedge, bending almost double, and though he moved swiftly, yet, thanks to his training and his care, his motion was so still that if there had been a wayfarer upon the road Henry Elizabeth could easily have passed him undetected. But the road was empty of all save moonlight when he came to the turn and saw ahead of him the wall and the gateway and the lodge building by the gate with its belfry black against the sky.

The shadow of the hedge only availed him for shelter till he should come opposite the gate. Then he must needs cross the strip of moonlit earth to reach the lodge whose curtained window made a patch of blood-colour in the black and white of the landscape. He glanced at the sky and saw that the moon was steering her course towards a scurry of black clouds that would soon envelope her. He waited patiently until she made her dip into the thick of it, and then confident to be both shadowless and invisible, he crawled on all fours across the road until he came to a pause under the protection of the wall and out of range of the lodge window. He had come unob-

served to the frontier of the enemy country. His next necessity was to scale the defences and instal himself within the walls.

The wall was of such a height that Henry Elizabeth, by standing on tip-toe, could do no more than feel the sharp edge of the summit with the balls of his fingers. But it needed no more than a countryman's active jump to plant the half of his hand on the flat of the wall, and any wall on which he could obtain so much purchase he was able to scale, seeing that his strength was so vastly greater than his drag of weight. In a very little while, therefore, he was astride the wall hard by the sloping roof of the lodge.

He worked his way along the wall towards the roof. It had a small uncurtained window which looked down upon the interior, and peering through he could see that the lodge room offered a comfortable contrast to the conditions of the outer world. It was warmed by a large brazier, the heat of which made a mist upon the glass pane. Though the glow of the brazier served in some measure to illuminate the room, revealing its simple furniture and its truckle bed, it was further lighted by a large horn lantern which stood on a little table in the centre of the room and showered its yellow effulgence upon the open pages of a book.

A man was seated by the table and bending over this book. He was turned directly away from the observer, so that he could see nothing of the man's head but of the back of his poll with its crop of closely cut hair. The man was well and warmly habited; he was liberally armed with sword, dagger, and a pair of pistols; he was also generously provisioned. A pasty, already partially disembowelled, stood hard by him on the table, flanked by an ample flagon. Ever and anon as the man read on his book he would extend his fingers to the pasty, grope his way to the security of a satisfactory morsel and convey it to his lips. When the morsel, thoughtfully masticated according to the eater's method of study, had vanished, the man, still absorbed in his book, would stretch out for the flagon without looking for it and with an unerring accuracy, which implied long practice, would clasp it and, conveying it to him, take a deep draught of its contents.

Thus through some diverted seconds for the observer, the unconsciously observed read and munched and read and drank

with what appeared to be a steady satisfaction. Every now and then, when he had come to the end of a right hand page, he would carefully lick his thumb and forefinger and wipe them gingerly on his jerkin before proceeding to turn the leaf. Henry Elizabeth noted that the rope of the bell in the belfry swung through the roof within easy reach of his grasp.

It was Henry Elizabeth's immediate business to deal with that same bell-pull. For all his troubled mood he experienced that queer sense of entertainment which is generally enjoyed by the human being who has full observation of the conduct of another human being who is wholly unaware of observation. He found himself wondering vaguely what was the subject of the book, what was the meat in the pasty, what was the liquor in the flagon. But he had his work to do and began to do it.

With a cautious dexterity he raised himself to his feet on the summit of the wall. By leaning himself at full length along the sloping roof in front of him he could easily reach the belfry and touch through the aperture the brazen lip of the bell. Lying thus on his stomach he held the bell steady with his left hand while he slipped his right hand underneath its cup and clasped his fingers tightly about the clapper. The bell was old. Time had rusted and weakened the attachment of the tongue. Henry Elizabeth had but to put his fingers into a grip and then into a twist, and the clapper lay in his palm and the bell was as voiceless as the mutilated lady in the Greek tale.

Having done so much to his purpose, Henry Elizabeth's next business was to silence the lodge's defender as he had already silenced the lodge's bell. Accordingly he sprawled over the roof till his feet hung over the void between the roof and the grounds inside the gate. Carefully he lowered himself till he hung by his hands from the gutter of the building. Then he let himself go and dropped as lightly as he could to the ground. But for all his care and for all the muffling of his boots, a man of his weight could not drop to earth in absolute silence. The sound that he made as he descended banged in his ears like a salvo of artillery, and he knew that it must have been startlingly audible to the watcher in the lodge. Henry Elizabeth, as he huddled in the shadow of the wall, could picture the inmate disturbed in his feast and his reading, poisoning

a greasy hand in the air as he quickened to the unexpected alarm. But while he pictured he acted. Noiseless now he slipped round towards the door of the lodge even as it opened, and a gush of warm light and air triangled the rigid pathway and softened the frigid air. In the yellow oblong of the door the lodge-keeper stood with a pistol in his hand peering out into the baffling whiteness of the night. Henry Elizabeth knew that he was not discernible, but he meant to be discerned, so he walked coolly forward in the triangle of light and greeted the lodge-keeper with a cheerful "Good evening."

He could see that the man peered bewildered into the moonlit garden. He could hear that the man whispered thickly some kind of challenge, half question, half menace. He could realise that the man was both surprised and alarmed, but that his surprise was greater than his alarm.

Henry Elizabeth came a little nearer, moving noiselessly, thanks to the fashion in which he was shod, and showing no manner of interest in the levelled pistol of the lodge-keeper.

"A message from Master Lillingworth," he said with so cheerful and composed a mendacity that the man, as if more than half reassured, lowered his weapon a little, though he still stood watchful upon his threshold. It was evident to Henry Elizabeth that the confusion of the unexpected summons and the assurance of the summoner had allied to perplex and unsettle the man's vigilance.

"What is the message?" he asked hoarsely, "and how did you come here?"

"I come from the house," said Henry Elizabeth, drawing softly nearer to the lodge door, "and my message is that you are a fool and a rogue."

Even as he spoke he sprang forward and caught the man, taken unawares, by the throat. The mighty squeeze of his left hand silenced the cry which the man would fain have uttered. With his right hand Henry Elizabeth snatched the weapon from the man's waning grip and dealt him with the butt end a tap on the mazzard, which made him slide helplessly to the ground. Henry Elizabeth tumbled him unceremoniously on his face, and producing a piece of stout cord, fastened his hands together by the wrists securely at his back. Then he rolled him over again and relieved him of the bunch of keys which depended from his girdle. It was easy to guess rightly



which was the key of the great gate, and in less than a minute it was unlocked, unbolted, and open for the entrance of the enemy.

Henry Elizabeth turned to the prostrate man, and picking him up with one hand set him on his legs again. He had recovered his scattered senses sufficiently to allow him to stand staggeringly while Henry Elizabeth's grip was on his neck, and to stare into his conqueror's face with a bemused effort to recall what had passed. But Henry Elizabeth allowed him little time for reflection.

"Forward, march," he commanded briefly, and still gripping the man's collar so tightly that he could voice no alarm, he pushed him through the open gate and into the moonlit highway chequered with black shadows.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LAYING SIEGE

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH pushed his helpless and indeed unresisting prisoner in front of him along the road which he had just travelled. The only difference was that as, on this occasion, there was not great call to be furtive, he took the white highway and disregarded the protection of the hedge. Stepping, himself, at a brisk pace and urging his captive to a like briskness, Henry Elizabeth covered his return journey with even greater rapidity than the outward bound, and soon found himself in the company of his expectant colleagues.

"My lord," said Henry Elizabeth, in a low voice, "I have brought in a prisoner, even the gate-keeper of the place."

He turned, as he spoke, to the guide from Whitefriars who held the lantern huddled under his cloak.

"Show me a light," he commanded, "that I may see the fellow's face, a sight which, up to now, has been denied me."

As the man obeyed, lifting the lantern into the cold air, Henry Elizabeth so twisted his grip on the neck of his prisoner as to bring his face within the compass of its flame. He looked upon a lean countenance, whose hue was of a sickly mixture between sunburn and native tallow, topped with a smooth mat of black hair.

Henry Elizabeth made a movement at once of recognition and of surprise.

"By the lord!" he cried, "I know you. You are Master Inch. Are you John Inch or Hugh Inch?"

The man thus addressed stared at his questioner in a great astonishment. Henry Elizabeth loosened his grip so as to allow him to speak freely, without affording him any opportunity to slip free.

"My name is indeed Inch," the prisoner answered, "though how you come to know as much surprises me. Also my first name is John."

"Then, John Inch," said Henry Elizabeth, "I have a favour to ask of you."

He could see that in the dim light which the lantern afforded John Inch's black face seemed to grow blacker.

"What favour can you ask that I can gratify?" he asked very sullenly.

"No more and no less than this," Henry Elizabeth answered, cheerfully. "I knew before I came hither—and your presence in the lodge confirms my knowledge—that a shrewd guard is maintained in the house of Master Lillingworth."

"What if there be?" John Inch answered, doggedly. "What business is that of yours or any of your company?"

"This much," Henry Elizabeth replied briskly, "that we here present, each and all of us, have business with a certain guest that Master Lillingworth harbours, a guest who is a friend of yours, Master Inch."

Master Inch's only reply to this statement was to shrug his shoulders and keep silence.

"Now I am very sure," Henry Elizabeth resumed, "that if any one were permitted by you to enter the gates, and to pass by that lodge where you lay so snugly, such an one would be given by you some signal or password, or counter-sign, or the like, which would make admission to the mansion an easy matter."

Master Inch still said nothing. From his stubborn carriage it might have been inferred either that he was deaf or that Henry Elizabeth was dumb. Henry Elizabeth began again.

"I am loth to seem unreasonable to you, Master Inch, but I am very peremptorily desirous to have immediate knowledge of the means to gain easy entrance to yonder house. Wherefore I shall take it kindly if you will help me in my need."

In the fitful glare of the lantern the sallow face of Master Inch was steadily directed against Henry Elizabeth.

"Are you a soldier?" he asked, with a certain gravity in his voice which pricked his immediate hearer.

"As for that," he replied, "I do not, as yet, follow the profession of arms, though it is my purpose so to serve Her Majesty very shortly."

"Anyways," said Master Inch, "I take it from your speech and your demeanour that you are a gentleman, even as I am."

"I am by birth a gentleman," said Henry Elizabeth, "and I hope I may never bring discredit upon my gentility."

"You are a gentleman," said John Inch, "and you are about to be a soldier. Tell me this, therefore. If you were placed in a post of trust, where you were set to defend one that was dear to you, and if you were taken unawares by the enemy and summoned to surrender the secret password to the citadel, would you deliver it up incontinently?"

Henry Elizabeth found himself somewhat taken aback by this direct enquiry. It was surprise, rather than any difficulty to find reply, which delayed his answer.

"Why no," he said, "very surely I should not."

Master Inch grunted.

"Even so," he said, "neither shall I."

When Henry Elizabeth was meditating over this dilemma, the worthy gentleman from Whitefriars came to his assistance with the suggestion that as far as Master Inch and his taciturnity were concerned, it might be taken for granted that it was a question of speak or swing.

And the gentleman from Whitefriars pointed significantly towards the lank bough of a neighbouring naked elm, and twitched, with equal significance, at his bridle leather, implying thereby that it, with perhaps another, would fashion as satisfactory a noose as man could wish to employ. A grave silence covered the little company. Master Inch took the suggestion with perfect equanimity.

"If you are of a mind to hang me," he said calmly, "I would ask this much courtesy before you set to work. I was reading on a book when our friend here"—he indicated Henry Elizabeth with a jerk of his thumb—"interrupted me. I should like, by your leaves, to finish the chapter and learn what happened to Master Panurge, in his manner of escaping from the hands of the Turks."

Henry Elizabeth could only gape in wonder at this strange request, which meant nothing in the world to him. But my lord of Roehampton straightway broke out into a hearty laugh, in which Master Gallop joined.

"By the sweet body of Venus!" he cried—for it was one of

his petty passions to swear pretty Italianate oaths—"it were an unforgiveable thing to hang a man whose last wish, at the foot of the gallows as it were, was to finish a chapter of that divine doctor and philosopher, Master François Rabelais. Wherefore I entreat you, Master Braginton, to leave this fellow his life."

"My lord," said Henry Elizabeth, who was busy removing the wrappings from his feet, "I had no thought to do otherwise. It were ill indeed if a man should perish for fidelity to his party. I make no doubt that we shall find our way within Master Lillingworth's mansion without any treason on Master Inch's part. And, for my part, I am always pleased to meet an honest man."

Master Inch's sallow face showed no sign of satisfaction at the reprieve accorded to him. My lord clapped a hand upon his shoulder.

"Master Inch," he said, "you shall come with us, and you shall read at ease in your Rabelais, albeit under safe custody, to make sure that you shall give no alarm to disturb our *manceuvres*."

On this affable understanding the little party, with its prisoner, shuffled its way, as silently as might be, along the road towards Lillingworth House. When they reached the gates, Master Inch was formally installed in his familiar lodge, with a pair of men to guard him, whose instructions were to let him read in peace as much Rabelais as he pleased; but to deal very sharply and swiftly with him if he made any effort to free himself from their custody. Then my Lord, and Henry Elizabeth and Master Gallop held a little council of war in the pathway. The question was how to gain entry to the house so as to take the household unawares and afford no opportunity to the object of their search to have his suspicions aroused, and either to escape or conceal himself.

My lord, who had had his practical lessons in soldiery as well as his theoretical, suggested that the first step was to approach what might, for the moment, be called the fortress, and study at close quarters its vulnerability to attack. As nobody had anything better to propose, and as the suggestion of Master Gallop that the door should be blown open by a mine of gunpowder was deemed impracticable, first from the lack of gunpowder, and secondly from the noisy warning such

a method would involve, the proposal of my lord was unanimously accepted.

The house stood before them gaunt and black against the moonlit sky. Whatever of life and liveliness might lie hidden behind its mask, gave no hint of its existence to the outer world. All the windows save one seemed to be shuttered or curtained so as not to emit the smallest chink of light, and in that one but a thin line of crimson showed against the darkness of the casement. No sound came from within to suggest inhabitation.

"The question is," said Henry Elizabeth more to himself than to my lord who stood close by him, "how are we to effect an entry into the house? It is easy enough to knock for admittance. It is not so easy to command an answer. These gentry doubtless knock by signals of which we are ignorant and if we alarm them our quarry may escape before the door is open to us."

My lord, as nonplussed as Henry Elizabeth, nodded his head but did not speak. But the latter was suddenly aware of a finger and thumb that had taken a pinch of his cloak from behind and was tugging at it to attract his attention. He turned sharply round and looked into the face of the Knave of Spades.

"By your leave, Master Braginton," said he, "I have in my mind a way to make entry into yonder inhospitable mansion?"

"How so?" Henry Elizabeth questioned.

"I have skirted the house," the Knave said, "and I find that all the doors at the back and all the lower windows are securely fastened. I could hear the clink of pots and the lilt of voices and singing in the servants' hall; it sounds as if they are making a night of it. It came into my mind that may be all the upper windows might not be so securely fastened, so I looked about me to see if I could chance upon a ladder anywhere."

"Well," said Henry Elizabeth impatiently. The Knave continued:

"Devil of a sign of a ladder could I find. There is a shed at the back which might house a dozen, but it is securely padlocked and could not be broken open without a deal of noise."

"I do not see how all this serves us in any way to gain

admission," said Henry Elizabeth with a measure of sourness in his voice.

"By your leave," said the Knave again, "it came into my thoughts that if we could not use a ladder of wood we might make shift with one of flesh and bone. If I gauge it rightly there is no greater space between us and yonder second row of windows than the height of two ordinary sized men. Now your honour is more than common tall, and I am myself something more than medium measure, and it occurred to me that if you would condescend to mount upon my shoulders, which were easy for you that are of a nimble gymnastic, you might test each of those same windows and see if one of them were by chance ajar."

"As I live," Henry Elizabeth declared, clapping him upon the shoulder, "I think that you have hit upon a good scheme and one that we will put into practice upon the instant."

He whispered a few words to my lord, explaining the Knave's proposition. Then the pair quitted their companions and made their way cautiously towards the mansion, keeping as they went as much under cover of the trees of the avenue as might be. When they reached the house they stopped for a moment to confer. Henry Elizabeth stared up at the windows and once more the chink of light that showed between loosely drawn curtains attracted his attention. It seemed to him that it might be a good thing to take a look into that room and see what manner and number of people were occupying it. He motioned with his head to the Knave and pointed to the window. "That is the one I will try," he said in a whisper. The Knave, without a word, planted his palms against the brick, straightened his parted legs, and stood waiting. In another minute Henry Elizabeth had climbed upon his back, and scrambled erect on to his shoulders. The man stood firm, in spite of the weight of Henry Elizabeth's great body, which the latter did his best to lessen by gripping the window-sill and slightly drawing himself upwards. Thus balanced, he applied his gaze to the opening in the curtains.

What he saw so shook him with surprise that he came near to losing his balance and he heard his fleshly pillar groan beneath him. Within the room, well warmed and well lit, two men sat at the table playing at chess, while a woman stood behind one of the players and watched the game. Of

the men one, as might be expected, was Master Lillingworth; the other, as had been hoped, was Sir Matthew Favill. Here was cause for gratification, not for amazement, but the presence of the woman was amazing. For the woman was the goldsmith's daughter Maudlin. She stood behind Sir Matthew's chair with her left hand resting lightly on its back, and the third finger carried a wedding ring. He guessed in a moment that she was married to Lillingworth: in the next moment he felt sure that it would have been better for Lillingworth if he had not made her his wife. For as he gazed he saw how, while Lillingworth bent over the board with puckered brows and puzzled countenance, the married hand of Maudlin shifted from the chair and tickled impishly the nape of Sir Matthew's neck, whereat Sir Matthew, without seeming to stir, furtively caressed her.

Before the watcher had time to reflect upon the whimsical significance of what he oversaw he was recalled to other thoughts by the sense that his support was yielding. The voice of the Knave of Spades drifted to him in a whisper.

"I'm giving way," he murmured, "I'm giving way."

Indeed Henry Elizabeth felt the stout shoulders tremble. Instantly he prepared to descend, but not before he had noted that a dark uncurtained window at the side of the room into which he had been peering seemed to be ajar. Keeping his balance he lowered his body till his hands rested on the head of the Knave of Spades. Then he jumped lightly to the ground.

"Thanks be," said his Atlas, stretching himself. "A little more and we should have tumbled to earth together."

"Yet there must be a little more," said Henry Elizabeth. "There is a black window yonder which may let me into the house. Brace yourself for another effort."

The Knave of Spades rubbed his aching arms and the tense muscles of his legs.

"So it be brief I can stand it," he said, "but you are a goodly weight, my master."

Once again the Knave stiffened himself against the wall; once again Henry Elizabeth climbed to his shoulders; but this time the living ladder was set against the window that Henry Elizabeth had noted. In the clear moonlight he could see that it



was loosely latched, and after a little fumbling with his dagger he got it open.

"All is well," he whispered to his supporter. "Let me free, and go gather the others by the great door."

Instantly Henry Elizabeth felt that his ankles were released from the supporting grasp. Gripping at the sill and helping himself with strenuous knee-play he lifted himself through the open casement and bundled as quietly as he could on to the floor of a narrow corridor. Scrambling to his feet he advanced cautiously, seeing his way clearly enough in the moonlight, till he came upon the landing of a great stairway. To his left he could see a glimmer of light under a doorway where the players at chess were busy with their varied businesses. He crept quietly down the stairs to the right till he found himself in a hall. Here he had no moonlight to help him, but he groped his way towards where the door should be, found it, and after a little fumbling laid his hands upon the bolts and drew them, and cautiously turned the great key in the lock. Then he pulled open the heavy door and looked out upon the moonlit lawn. His companions were waiting for him under the shadow of the trees, and he joined them swiftly.

Hurriedly he gave his orders. The Knave of Spades with his own following from Whitefriars was to hasten to the servants' quarters at the rear of the house and make them prisoners with as little stir as might be. This was a task which did not threaten difficulty seeing that the underlings would be taken by surprise and faced by a strongly armed party. While the Knave of Spades set about this enterprise Henry Elizabeth with Lord Roehampton and Master Gallop by his side, and followed by Lord Roehampton's men, softly ascended the stairs and came to a halt outside the doorway with the revealing gleam of light.

"By your lordship's favour," Henry Elizabeth whispered to his companion, "I would entreat you to wait here a little while I enter and speak with my enemy."

"You are my leader in this enterprise," said my lord quietly, "you command and I obey."

Henry Elizabeth placed his hand gently upon the latch of the door, pushed it open and passed noiselessly within.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PARLEY

**W**HEN Henry Elizabeth entered the room, it was still occupied by the two men whom he had seen so busily engaged upon the playing of a game of chess, and by the woman who had been playing her own game. His noiseless entrance did not for a moment disturb any of them. Sir Matthew Favill, the man who had taunted him and shamed him at the forge at Braginton, the man whom he would have hated with all his heart for his own sake, if he had not had cause to hate him yet more hotly for the sake of a fair and unhappy lady and the memory of a foully murdered man, was placed at the table so that he was facing him. He appreciated more keenly now than then the man's sinister comeliness. Master Lillingworth made as marked a contrast to his guest as a student of character could wish to see, with his air of foolish ill-nature, his girth, his gorgeous habiliments; the whole invested with a kind of bumptious simplicity that was too near akin to silliness to be easily distinguished from it. He had just made a move in the game which he was regarding with a fatuous complacency. Behind Sir Matthew, Maudlin stood with her fingers resting on the back of his chair. Sir Matthew, studying the board, held one hand over the pieces like a hovering hawk before it swoops.

Even as his hand hovered the player became aware that there was a stranger in the room. He gave one quick glance in the direction of Henry Elizabeth and then returned his attention to the board. The steadiness of his hand had never been disturbed by the momentary interruption. Still he weighed chances, summed results, estimated possibilities. Then suddenly his hand descended, moved the essential man, and left

Master Lillingworth, as yet ignorant of any intrusion, gaping. It was evident to Henry Elizabeth that Sir Matthew had made a good move.

Maudlin, raising her eyes from the board, suddenly became aware of the newcomer. She gaped and gazed as if she had been stricken to salt. Master Lillingworth swore a comfortable oath at his adversary's skill, and advanced a podgy finger and thumb for a rally. But his opponent laid a restraining lean hand upon his host's plump one.

"I perceive," said Sir Matthew, "that we have company."

Master Lillingworth turned his thick neck, and his florid face stared at Henry Elizabeth over his shoulder. Blank astonishment gave way to anger as he rose from his seat.

"Who in the devil's name is this?" he cried, peering at Henry Elizabeth where he stood in semi-darkness out of the immediate light shed by the candles that stood on the table.

"You should know well enough who it is," said Maudlin crisply. "It is Master Braginton."

"Master Lillingworth," said Henry Elizabeth taking a step forward, "I want nothing with you. But I want something with Sir Matthew Favill. I came in by way of your great gate-way and your hall door. As for my name I am Henry Elizabeth Braginton, as yonder lady says, and we are not strangers."

Master Lillingworth's ruddy jowl purpled with an indignation that left him inarticulate. Sir Matthew seated unmoved in his chair, eyed Henry Elizabeth critically.

"I have seen you before," he said. "I have heard your name before."

"You have seen me twice before," said the young man steadily. "The first time was in the spring of the year, by Braginton forge, in Devon, when it pleased your humour to make a laughing-stock of me. The second time was awhile in a certain river house in Chelsey, where I made a laughing-stock of you. It seems that we have a very pretty account to settle and I have come to settle it."

There was a momentary silence during which Sir Matthew sat motionless and watched Henry Elizabeth curiously. There had been a narrowing of his dark eyes at Henry Elizabeth's reference to the house at Chelsey, and the young man knew that his words had pricked him. It was plain to Henry Eliza-

beth that he was thinking swiftly behind the stillness of his visage and the young man almost felt that he could see his thoughts and that they were of Ludovica. Master Lillingworth broke the silence.

"Where are my servants?" he bawled. "What are they about that they suffer such a ranter as this to push in among gentlefolk at this time of the night?"

"Save your breath, Master Lillingworth," Henry Elizabeth said politely, "and keep your temper; no servant of yours will come for all your bellowing. People who join in plots against the queen's majesty must not expect to be treated with too great a punctilio; but nevertheless I tell you that my business here is not with you, knave though you be, but with Sir Matthew Favill yonder."

Sir Matthew shifted in his seat so as to face Henry Elizabeth more directly and spoke sharply.

"What is your business with me? Spit it out with less fumbling preliminary. I remember you once for a drunken booby by a forge, but what other meeting you babble of I know not."

Henry Elizabeth smiled into his face.

"Let that pass," he said. "When we first met you were pleased to make sport of me. It is not always good work to gall the wild boar. I was a simple country-side fellow then and you made me your enemy."

Sir Matthew made a great show of amusement though Henry Elizabeth could see that he was perplexed and fretted.

"My good fellow," he said with contemptuous affability, "I have chanced in my time to make many enemies, and always my foes have had cause to regret the enmity. You will therefore understand that I find it hard to comprehend why I should concern myself with any dislike you may be pleased to cherish."

"Hearken," said Henry Elizabeth steadily, "your insolence to the booby by Braginton forge has paid you an ill penny. I might in my wiser judgment have forgiven you, but you have wickedly wronged a sweet lady and for that sin I have no mind to forgive you."

Sir Matthew's eyes grew dark with rage and a gleam leaped into them.

"So is it you who have hidden her," he said softly, "and my

lady has been mewling. Has she paid you well for your championship, young Amadis?"

The hatefulness of his meaning was plain, but Henry Elizabeth ignored it. "And I do not think that you can render my lady much service," went on Sir Matthew's malicious voice, with a note of triumph in it.

Henry Elizabeth knew very well what his thoughts were busy upon.

"I cannot render her the service I had hoped to render," he replied. "But I have in God's mercy been able to do something to make amends. The queen's flag now flies on Lundy."

At these words a change came over Sir Matthew's face. He leaned forward fiercely, gripping the arms of his chair. Maudlin slightly shifted her position behind his chair so that she could watch the faces of both antagonists.

"I think you lie," said Sir Matthew, but there was no great confidence in his voice. Henry Elizabeth was hot with satisfaction to have so moved him.

"Indeed I do not lie," he answered. "I took Lundy a week ago. Your rogues are lodged in Bristol gaol. And I charge you with the foul and treacherous murder of Philip Harrington.

Sir Matthew leaned back in his chair and a smile of hateful satisfaction contorted his face.

"Philip Harrington," he said, "was a plotter against the queen, and his death is a gain to the realm."

"I know different," said Henry Elizabeth calmly. "It is you who are a plotter against the queen, and your death will be a gain to the realm, which is why I visit you to-night."

Sir Matthew turned a little aside and extended his hands towards the fire, as if to suggest that the intruding stranger had brought with him into the comfortable room some breath and rigour of the outside chill.

"So you think you have come here to kill me, young Devonshire?" he said with a tranquillity more galling than a jeer. Henry Elizabeth took him up.

"I know that I have come here to kill you. I believe that I shall justify my purpose."

Master Lillingworth, who all this time had been staring at the two speakers with a puzzled look that showed how little of their words he could understand, now rose from his seat

and opened his mouth to speak. But his wife's hand on his shoulder pressed him back into his chair with the words unuttered. It was plain that she held him completely under her sway. Meanwhile she watched the scene with bright unwinking eyes.

"Do you propose to butcher me under my friend's roof?" Sir Matthew asked banteringly. "It must be so, for I do not think that even you would be fool enough to oppose me single-handed, from the little I remember of your sword-play. Where are your bravoos? Why do you delay to bring them in?"

"I come with no bravoos," Henry Elizabeth said quietly, "though I choose to guard the house against your escape. But I have brought a friend with me to assure you that I intend to carry myself against you as if you were an honourable man."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DUEL

HE stepped to the door as he spoke and, opening it, ushered in Lord Roehampton who had been waiting on the landing for this summons. He was followed by Master Gallop, looking grave as only a jester could.

"Here is my Lord Roehampton," Henry Elizabeth said, "who has consented to accompany me hither, that he may bear witness to my sovereign mistress and queen of my conduct in this matter."

Sir Matthew turned from the fire and rose to his feet as the young earl entered the room.

"I have had the honour," he said with a well measured inclination which was no more and no less than ceremony demanded, "of meeting your lordship in some of the best company in the world. I did not think to meet you again in the worst."

Lord Roehampton, bowing gracefully in recognition of the presence of a woman in the company, returned his salutation coolly.

"I remember now very well where I met you," he said. "It was at Sebastien's gaming house in the Rue St. Honoré in Paris. But I do not remember ever to have been in better company than Master Braginton's, who has come here to fight you."

Sir Matthew shifted his position a little so that he stood in front of the fire with his hands behind his back, as if he were still warming them at the blaze.

"I were willing enough to fight him," he said, "if I were assured that the conditions were fair. For that the presence of my Lord Roehampton should be a sufficient guarantee. All I ask and indeed command is that when I have killed Master Braginton—I believe that is the name—I shall be free to depart

unhindered. Otherwise I shall stand as I am and leave him free to run me through my undefended body."

Henry Elizabeth spoke.

"I ask no better. Here is a private quarrel between two private men, for so the queen has permitted that I should treat it. My lord is good enough to stand by me as my second. Master Lillingworth will no doubt do the like for you. Where shall we have our quarrel out?"

"What better place than here?" said the voice of Maudlin quietly. It was the first time she had spoken since the arrival of the strangers. It was the first time they were forced to take definite notice of her, though all had been uneasily aware of her presence.

Sir Matthew gave her a curious glance. His eyes went to Henry Elizabeth's face and then back to the woman's. It seemed as if they read her inmost thoughts.

"Here is a good enough field," he said with a thin smile. "Do you propose to be the Queen of Beauty at these jousts?"

Maudlin nodded in silence. The men all looked at her, and Lord Roehampton, a frown puckering his forehead, addressed her directly.

"Scenes of this kind are not fitted for a woman's eyes," he said, "and I would suggest that you withdraw, mistress, until all is over."

Maudlin looked at him with her shining blue eyes.

"I thank you, my lord," she said coldly, "for your proffered advice, but I must tell you that in my own house I do as I wish, and it is my wish now to remain."

Lord Roehampton bowed and said no more. Master Gallop shrugged his shoulders and murmured that a woman's wish was law. Master Lillingworth made as if he would have remonstrated with her but a something in his wife's eyes quelled and quenched him. Henry Elizabeth was again struck with the sense of latent strength that she diffused around her. He looked at her calm face with wonder. Of the men in the room she had offered herself to one, she was the wife of another, and unless he erred grievously, she was the leman of the third. He turned away.

"Let us fight here," he said. "One place is as good as another to me."

"Have you no prayers to utter, no bequests to make?" Sir



Matthew asked with a sneer. "I have no occasion to love you but I would not be so ungallant an adversary as to treat with disdain the last wishes of a man about to die."

Henry Elizabeth answered this challenge with a comfortable smile.

"Like the blessed apostle," he said, "I die daily, but not as I think for the last time this day. For I hope and believe that heaven has permitted me to live to this hour that I may here do justice on a foul and false gentleman, who is a traitor to his queen, a wronger of women, and a murderer of youth taken unaware."

"Your talk splutters like green wood that burns badly," said Sir Matthew savagely.

"Then I will talk no more," said Henry Elizabeth, "for all speech is but a waste of breath where there is good work to do."

In unison with Master Lillingworth my lord went through all the formalities of the proper duello. It was understood from the first that it was to be a fight to a finish, and it was further agreed, in accordance with the demand of Sir Matthew, that whoever came out master in the passage at arms was to be free to go his way unchecked and unchallenged. It was plain when he made these conditions that he was certain of profiting by them himself. Lord Roehampton made a little recital of the conditions with as careful a music and as firm an emphasis as if he were intoning the litany. Then he turned to Maudlin.

"As you choose, lady, to be present at this essay it were but fitting that you should give the signal. Will you drop your kerchief when you wish the gladiators to begin?"

It was plain from my lord's voice and manner that he saw in Maudlin a figure that might have stood in a tragedy of Seneca. Maudlin, with a changeless face, bowed her head and the business went forward.

The two men stood face to face at the deliberated distance, each with his sword and dagger drawn ready for action. Maudlin lifted her hand and the kerchief dropped through the air. The moment it touched the floor the weapons of the opponents met.

My lord watched the ensuing contest with the delicately critical appreciation of an Aficianado of a Spanish bull-fight or a

refinée of the court of Valois. For the moment he had forgotten all ties of friendship, all personal inclinations, all consciousness of the fact that one of the combatants was very certainly a Queen's man and the other very certainly the Queen's enemy. They were merely now two striving creatures, pitting their skill against one another in the most magnificent and the most difficult of all forms of human quarrel.

He saw, however, from the first few moments of the conflict that Sir Matthew Favill was a swordsman of the very highest standing, and so far as it was possible for him to separate himself from his rigid judiciousness he began to wonder how far those lessons at Ruffian Hall of which he had been at first so amused, and later so admiring, a spectator, might avail the gentleman from Devonshire in this ultimate wager of battle.

And here again there came another surprise for my lord of Roehampton. For it appeared to his watchful ken that Master Polidori's pupil was not doing Master Polidori as much credit as Lord Roehampton had expected. It was true that in the beginning his tactics were purely defensive, a method both discreet and commendable where one combatant is anxious to gauge as best he may the extent of his antagonist's ability. It was true, too, that when Sir Matthew engaged upon a vigorous and fierce offensive Master Braginton was able, by well-timed retirements and authoritative parries to hold his own and conserve a whole skill. But my lord did not recognise in his carriage and manœuvre the alacrity and dash which he had come to regard as characteristic of the swordsmanship of the West Country man.

Yet even as he thus half consciously reflected, reproving the partiality which tended to dull the sharpness of his judgment, he began to be aware that there was something very like a definite method in Henry Elizabeth's behaviour. Clearly it was not for nothing that every weighed and calculated violence of Sir Matthew's was patiently and invariably put of one side; that his hail of strokes never once succeeded in finding his cautious adversary off his guard. Roehampton began to believe that the West Country man was not merely playing a wary game for safety, but that he was deliberately testing his enemy with a view to ascertain the lines of his strategy and the limits of his resources. And this conjecture was speedily to be verified. As Sir Matthew came to a momentary pause after one

of his hammering attacks and crouched with extended arms and gleaming weapons in preparation for another furious charge, Henry Elizabeth seemed to my lord to stiffen a little in his bearing like one that tells himself that enough time has been wasted in idle give and take and that it is now full season for serious enterprise. So, behold, in a moment the situation changed and he that stood of late on a discreet defence suddenly transformed into an assailant at once persistent and terrible.

It appeared now to my lord as if the whole art of attack were being practised before his dazzled eyes. Master Lillingworth it may be, and even Master Gallop, saw nothing more in the spectacle than two men fighting for their lives, and had little idea of how well or how ill it was done on either part. While Sir Matthew stood his ground against the attack of Henry Elizabeth it was now plain to my lord that he did so with difficulty and that he was exerting all his artifice in self-defence. Again for an instant the enchantment of the scene rendered my lord indifferent to any other emotion than physical satisfaction. Here before him, as at a theatre, two men who both seemed masters of their art were playing the great game for his benefit and delight. There was not one drop of scarlet blood upon the rushes that strewed the floor. There was not one rent or slit in either man's garments. It was for all the world so like some splendid contest in the school, with symbolic wreath for the reward of victory, that my lord found himself anew forgetting the seriousness of the issue and merely asking himself "which is the better man?" And at that moment the question was answered when Henry Elizabeth thrust his weapon through Sir Matthew Favill's heart and shed the first and last blood of the combat.

Sir Matthew stood erect for a moment and then, as Henry Elizabeth jerked his sword free, he pitched forward upon his face and lay quiet. His right hand still grasped his sword, but his left hand relaxed its grip and his dagger fell from his hand a little way from his body.

For a moment my lord fancied that he beheld merely the brisk finish to a civil bout. But already Henry Elizabeth had knelt by the side of the fallen man and had turned him over on his back. His face, as still and sinister in death as it had been still and sinister in life, stared impassively at the

candles. Henry Elizabeth looked up as Roehampton, Gallop and Lillingworth approached him.

"I call you to witness, my lord," he said, "and you, Master Lillingworth, and you Master Gallop, that this quarrel was fought out honourably according to the laws of combat."

"Master Braginton," said my lord gravely, "you have carried yourself in this matter as a good and true gentleman should, and so I shall report to her majesty. I doubt not that Master Lillingworth and Master Gallop are of my mind."

Lillingworth nodded the agreement he seemed unable to utter. Gallop made a ceremonial bow. Maudlin, keeping her rigid stand, looked curiously from the dead man to her husband and then fixed her steadfast gaze on the victor. Henry Elizabeth, heedless of her regard, picked up Sir Matthew's dagger, removed its sheath from the fallen man's belt and put the blade back into its house.

"My lord," he said, as he thrust the weapon into the bosom of his doublet, "I will take this dagger to one whom, after her majesty, I serve most loyally and devotedly in all the world, as a token that a great crime has been in a measure avenged."

My lord bowed his head in silent consent and, turning, concerted with Lillingworth and Gallop for the conveyance of the body into another room. As he did so Maudlin approached Henry Elizabeth and spoke to him in a low voice.

"You are a strong man," she said, "and I was right in thinking high thoughts of you. It is a pity you were not of my mind. We should have done great things together." She paused, as if waiting to see if he would speak, but he said never a word. Then she turned and quitted the room and he did not see her again.

## CHAPTER XVI

### FAREWELL

**E**ARLY the next morning Henry Elizabeth rose, and after breaking his fast very silently in company with Master Gallop, who respected and regretted his guest's taciturnity, he made his lonely way to a neighbouring church. Henry Elizabeth was indeed but an indifferent churchgoer. His religious education at the hands of his reverend chaplain had not been of the kind to kindle the devout instincts, but he had in him, as most strong and honest men have, the essence of the matter and it seemed to him in his simplicity that after what he had done and before what he was about to do, no better postword nor foreword could be found than a prayer in the house of God. Wherefore he knelt and prayed, confusedly enough. A little for the soul of Sir Matthew Favill because he did not wish to be spiritually ungenerous to an enemy whom he was glad to know out of the way: much for the soul of Philip Harrington whom he had never seen and who yet had done him more real hurt even than his enemy: most for the living body of Ludovica Campion, the woman he loved, the woman he had hoped to win, the woman he had striven to serve, the woman whose heart it had now become his bitter business to break.

For a space he prayed vaguely, hardly knowing what he said or what he thought, but beseeching wistfully for strength and support in what he had to do, and pardon for what he had done if heaven decreed that it needed pardon. He was sure that he had done right according to his light and would do the same again, if it were to do afresh. After a while a certain sense of consolation seemed to come over his troubled spirit. He bowed his head upon his clasped hands, and if he murmured no words at least his mind was more tranquil and he felt himself stiffened for the ordeal he had yet to endure. Soon he rose and

quitted the church and changed its solemn gloom for the noise and colour of a busy and buoyant world peopled with creatures who were wholly indifferent to him and his concerns, and to whom it meant nothing that Philip Harrington and Matthew Favill were dead, and that Ludovica Campion and Henry Elizabeth Braginton were alive and unhappy.

When he came to a halt at the door of the religious house in which his lady had been aided to take refuge, Henry Elizabeth learned that a world of rushing thoughts may be crowded into the space between one simple action and another. In the few moments that elapsed between the clutch of his hand at the bell-pull and the thrusting aside of the little panel that made the judas in the door, he seemed to have asked himself a score of question and to have failed to find a single answer. How would it have been with him if he had returned indeed triumphant, with the woman's lover safe and sound? How would the gratitude, now forever denied to him, have balsamed the anguish of his heart, for which it would seem there was now no balsam possible? How would it have been with him if, as he stood there with his mission fulfilled and unfulfilled, he had had the least drop of hope in the cup of his bitterness that time might bring consolation for her, and its consequences of kindness for him. How would it have been with him if he had paid the Lady of the Forge no more heed than the flare of a sudden fancy, and had been content to abide in Braginton, leaving the great world and its feast of despair untasted? The questioner knew that his questioning was vain, that the thing which existed was the thing which had to be. And even as he vaguely came to this conclusion the judas panel shifted, and he was peered at from within. He could see dimly a coiled face, hear dimly a gentle voice.

He gave his name and his business, which was to have speech with Mistress Campion. The janitress seemed to understand that the call was answerable, for though the judas slits were instantly shuttered a sound of drawing bolts and turning keys assured the waiter on the threshold of admittance. The door yawned slowly, cautiously, like the mouth of a weary hearer who gapes behind his hand at a great man's tale, and a hooded religious signalled to the visitor to enter.

Henry Elizabeth followed his guide over a flagged walk through a doorway into a great hall. There he was delivered

into the care of another religious who, after receiving his name and the name of her he sought, conducted him up what seemed to be an infinity of stone stairs, and along an eternity of stone corridors until she came to a halt in front of a small door. She signed to the visitor to wait, and passed through the door out of sight. She was scarcely absent a minute but it seemed to the young man as if he had stood for an age in that chill place waiting for the delivery of a doom whose form he knew when he began to wait. The door opened again and the sister beckoned him within. He obeyed and found himself in a small passage through which he followed the sister to another door. Through this he passed into the presence which he sought.

She stood before him. A door closed behind him. He was alone with her. Once again he beheld his image of immortal beauty. She had risen as he entered, from the reading of a book, and she stared at him as if she were surprised to find him unaccompanied. There was a moment of silence between the facing pair, while the still air seemed troubled by the mutter of terrible voices. Then the man spoke.

"Dear lady, have you strength for a sad message?"

Ludovica's body stiffened a little as the weakest stiffen against an unexpected blow. Her face had been pale enough, but it grew paler and her lips trembled. Though she was inaudible he knew that she meant him to speak.

"Lady," he said, "I have not done what you wished because it was impossible. Philip Harrington was slain by Matthew Favill on the day when you sailed from Lundy."

"The fiend," she cried, "the fiend, the wicked fiend."

She stood very rigid as she spoke with her arms close to her sides. She seemed rather an image of sorrow than its living victim.

Henry Elizabeth drew from his bosom a packet.

"I bring you this from Lundy," he said. "Sir Matthew left it there to greet you with if you had ever returned thither."

The woman moved into vitality again at the sight of the packet. She took it from the man's hand, and seating herself again, broke the seals and opening the box, looked fixedly at the contents. Then she took them out, one by one, first the rings, and last the lock of bloodied yellow hair. As she took each object from the box she lifted it with reverence to her

lips and kissed it tenderly. As her witness believed, with each salute she murmured the words "my dear" softly to herself. Then she laid the tragic treasures in her lap and covered them with her crossed palms. She looked at Henry Elizabeth with grave steadfast tearless eyes.

"I might have known," she said, "I might have guessed. But I did not know and I did not guess. I thank you for your bravery and your faith."

"Lady," said Henry Elizabeth—and his voice defied his will, and trembled—"I have not made an end of my errand. Nothing can undo the committed crime, but at least by heaven's favour it has not gone unavenged."

The woman's pallor flushed, the woman's eyes brightened. She leaned forward a little and her hands that had sheltered her gifts were now gripped together as if in the intensity of prayer.

"If I were not a Christian man," he said, "and you were not a Christian woman I should fling on this floor a lump of bleeding flesh and say, there lies the heart of Sir Matthew Favill. But because we are both of the ancient faith, and because you are a gentlewoman as I am a gentleman I do no more than tender you this token."

As he spoke he drew from his breast a dagger and held it out for her to see clearly.

"This," he said, "is the dagger of Sir Matthew Favill with which he slew the man you loved. I took it from the ground yester-evening after I had killed him in more honourable combat than his infamy deserved. For I could have hanged him, and would have hanged him for the traitor that he was proclaimed and the murderer he was proved, but that I believed it more due to your service and my honour to give him the wager of battle with God and the Devil to watch us."

He set, as he spoke, the dagger on the table before her, avoiding with a sudden grace for which he was afterwards grateful, the instant temptation to cast it into her lap and so sully those precious relics that she nursed.

Ludovica sat still for a little while in silence, gazing at the weapon that carried on its hilt the arms of the Favills, the arms that had once been the blazon of a brave race and creditable men. Then she turned towards Henry Elizabeth a face that was almost smiling.



"You are a brave gentleman," she said, "and you have done me true service, for which I can never reward you save by remembering you in my prayers. But from the heart of my heart I thank you for your chivalry, from the heart of my heart I beseech heaven that it may accord you some measure of the happiness that you deserve. That heaven in due season will yield you honour and fame I cannot doubt, knowing what you have done so nobly for the sake of a friendless woman and a fair dream. So I who am as one that is dead lean from my living grave to you who are quick and valiant, to give you my thanks and, if I dared hope that it might avail to help you, my blessing."

There were no tears in her eyes as she spoke, but the eyes of Henry Elizabeth were dim as he listened and looked. In his heart there surged up a great wave of rebellion and longing. He saw her as she sat there in her beauty and youth, and her description of herself as one that is dead wrung his heart with an intolerable pang; and the thought that she was going from him, the woman upon whom his soul was set, and that he would see her no more shook his spirit with the feeling that it must not be, that he must prevent it. Then he looked into her eyes and saw the misery that lay there, and so all thought of self left him. She gazed at him with a strange pity and admiration and lifted her cold hands towards him. Henry Elizabeth fell on his knees and for one moment caught them and held them to his breast. Then he kissed her fingers reverently. "Good-bye," he murmured. He rose, and taking one last look at her as she sat there in her sadness with her tragic treasures lying in her lap, he turned and went out by the door to the work that he had yet to do.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE PARSON'S TALE

**H**ENRY ELIZABETH'S return journey from East to West was indeed a melancholy pilgrimage. If he had been more of a poet than nature had been pleased to make him he might have compared it truthfully enough with an old man's revisitation, for the first time, of the scenes of his youth. For he knew very surely, though he could not have expressed it in language of scholarship or wit, that he had changed greatly since the day when he stole away from Braginton. "I am now old who have been young." The words of David dinned in his brain, or at least their meaning. He had gone forth to adventure like a foolish lout. He returned from adventure with all the gravity and more than all the sadness of old age. If in a sense he had won the result he had set out to compass, he had lost forever the reward which had lured him to his enterprise. While he was keenly aware that he had overthrown his enemy, he was dumbly conscious that after all this was but a little and pitiful success and that he had missed the greater glory. His mind was all of a tumble. He did not know how to reduce his troubled emotions to some common law. But at least he was certain of one thing: that he ought to go on and that he was going on.

As Henry Elizabeth came within sight of Exeter Town he was aware of a man upon the highway who was moving towards him and who carried himself very strangely. He was travelling afoot and he staggered in his career from one side of the road to the other in a futility of zig-zag which could not save his wind, for the road was level enough, and which must needs retard his journey. Although this pedestrian was a good way off there was something about his demeanour which seemed familiar to the traveller. Henry Elizabeth had slackened his speed a little as the spires and pinnacles of the

ancient city came into view because he was thinking of the last time he had been within its gates, and had seen the incomparable woman, and had pushed out on his way to win the world. But an odd curiosity to make closer acquaintance with the titubating figure in the distance urged him to use of spur, and he trotted forward at a sharp pace. As he neared the wayfarer he could not only see him but hear him, for through the stillness of the autumn air certain sounds came to his ears which made it clear that the staggering traveller was singing a song to cheer himself in his divagations.

Something in the sound of the hiccougging, sodden voice was more familiar to Henry Elizabeth's sense of hearing than the show of the swaying figure was to his sense of sight.

At first Henry Elizabeth could only catch the notes of a rough and blustering tune, but as the horseman and the footman drew nearer to one another, the rider could hear some words of an uncouth song which ran thus:

"There was never a man since Adam span  
And Eve delved Eden's garden,  
Who could drink more ale from a pewter can  
If I had but a copper farden."

He came upon the man just at the moment when, in the middle of another verse—which was still the same verse, for he sang no other—he gave a kind of whoop and sat down with a thump in the middle of the road. Henry Elizabeth, reining up to avoid riding over the squatting man, leaned over his horse's neck to stare into an upturned, pimpled, crimson face, and saw that he was looking down upon the countenance of the chaplain of Braginton, and that the chaplain of Braginton was very heavily drenched with liquor.

At the same moment that Henry Elizabeth recognised his chaplain the Reverend Eldwood recognised his patron. He leered up at him with a familiar effrontery, waved his arms wildly in an attempt at cheerful greeting, and began again upon his interminable song:

"There was never a man since Adam span——"

Henry Elizabeth interrupted him gruffly enough. Swinging

himself off his horse, he caught the parson by the collar of his tattered, bedrabbled cassock and hoisted him violently to his feet.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he questioned with a fierceness in his voice which had some effect, momentarily, in sobering the reverend adventurer.

"I was looking for you," he gurgled. "Going to London. Lucky find you sooner. Needle. Bottle of hay."

At this point his slightly rallied reason failed him, and he lurched forward and would have fallen if Henry Elizabeth had not still sustained him by a tight grip upon his collar.

"Why were you seeking me?" he asked. "Why did you leave Braginton?"

The parson stared stupidly into the speaker's face and waggled his head from side to side dismally.

"Nothing left to stay for," he muttered. "Nothing left to stay in. Thought it best to tell you all about it."

At this point his mind again began to wander, and he struck up anew his silly song:

"There was never a man since Adam span——"

But Henry Elizabeth shook him so violently as to shake all desire or at least all power of singing out of him.

"You fool," he cried angrily, "will you tell me your tale plainly?"

As he spoke he looked at the fellow with a qualm of disgust. Here was the wretched creature that had betrayed a duty as the teacher and guide of youth. Here was the abject scarecrow that he had once consented to consider an agreeable pot-companion. Here was the foul picture, and no parody, of what Henry Elizabeth might, aye, must have become if he had remained in Braginton with such a fellow for a cellarman, ever at his elbow. His stomach turned so queasy at the thought, that he felt mighty near to be sick.

The parson pulled from his pocket a bottle half full of liquor and made to lift it to his lips. Henry Elizabeth twitched it from his fingers, tilted it to his nose, and learned that it contained strong waters. For a moment he had a mind to fling it into the nearest field, but with a sudden sense that if it were bad to abuse good liquor it was something of a sin to

waste it, he set the flagon on the ground. He saw that the parson was sinking deeper into his drunken stupor, and he was determined to make him say what he had to say. Leading his horse with one hand and pulling the parson with the other, he carried the drunken man to the side of the road and propped him up, a protesting incoherent bundle, against the hedge. Looking about him, he discerned a neighbouring ditch thick with weedy water. He plucked the parson's battered hat from his head, and after fastening his horse to a tree, sped to the pool and filled the hat with water. He bore it back, dripping, to where the parson sat and soused his flaming face liberally with the contents until the man, spluttering and cursing, began to show some signs of returning consciousness.

"Now," said Henry Elizabeth peremptorily, "tell me what you have got to tell."

The parson peeped at him with fishy eyes, at once bewildered and indignant.

"Your wife——" he began huskily, and then choked and grunted and pawed at his face with dirty hands in an endeavour to sweep away the moisture that annoyed him.

"What do you mean by my wife?" Henry Elizabeth asked angrily, remembering the words of Tobias Flood. "You know very well that I have no wife."

"Oh yes, you have," the parson sniggered, "or rather I should say you had."

Here his interval of lucidity dimmed, but Henry Elizabeth clapped the saturated limpness of the hat over his face and revived his flagging vitality.

"You signed a bond to Mistress Copping," he said, "which was as binding as any deed of marriage. By right of it she came to Braginton with her brother, and a merry time of it we all had while it lasted. I will not go so far as to say that we were without our troubles, for the country folk took very unkindly the presence of the smith at the Manor House, and he levied rents in a way they liked so little that there were many grumblings and muttered threatenings. But we heeded them not."

While he spoke he had been fumbling in the under folds of his cassock, and now he produced therefrom a crumpled and dirty piece of paper that he apparently had tried with

no great success to smooth and fold into some kind of decent shape. This he now wagged foolishly before him, under the impression that he was tendering it to his lord.

Henry Elizabeth snatched the paper impatiently from his erratic fingers, straightened it out and read it with a growing gloom. Its contents were not to be misunderstood nor misinterpreted. They set forth no more and no less than a clear pledge of marriage between him and the smith's sister, and his own sprawling signature ran at the end in testimony against his memory. Thus suddenly faced with this amazing paper, Henry Elizabeth began to recall some of the episodes of that drunken eve before he quitted Braginton. The document was on the face of it a promise of marriage. Even if it were not legally binding—and it was patently a bond from which no honourable man could shake himself free—it was this paper that had then gained for him the gratification of his desire.

He glared in a rage at the shabby rascal squatting under the hedge and shook the paper at him.

"Go on with your story," he said; "tell the rest of your tale and be damned to you."

The parson permitted himself a series of refreshing hiccoughs before he found the necessary ease for the resumption of his narrative.

"There is precious little more to tell," he said with an unsuccessful effort to look dignified and grave which assorted ill with his drunkenness. "But a little while ago my lady your wife was brought to bed with a seven month's child, if it please you, owing to a stumble on the stairs that befell her, and she died in childbirth, poor fool, leaving to the world a puling boy that should call you daddy. Strange that so strong a lass should die in so simple a fashion."

He drowsed again with his head lolling on his breast. Henry Elizabeth, gasping at the tidings shook him into consciousness.

"There is a child," he said, and his voice was full of sorrow and horror. "Where is the child?"

"That is more than I can tell you," the parson replied with a foolish grin. "When your wife was taken with her pains Mistress Flood came to tend her, she that is Tobias Flood's sister, and when the woman died Mistress Flood disappeared

and the child with her, and no one knows where she is now, or where her brother is neither, for both of them departed like a thief in the night as the scripture has it.

Henry Elizabeth listened aghast to the narrative of the reprobate. If he had sinned he was being punished for his sin. He jostled the parson again into a measure of wakefulness.

"Go on," he commanded grimly. "Tell out the rest of your tale."

The parson chuckled drunkenly.

"There is little more to tell," he said again, "yet that little makes bad hearing enough. I buried the poor wench with all due rights and decorums, and then her brother and I sat us down to drink to her memory, and then——"

His voice trailed off drowsily into silence. Henry Elizabeth stirred him up again.

"What happened then?" he questioned, for he knew that in the mists of the parson's intelligence there was yet something to be delivered. The parson made an effort.

"I believe that I was overtaken by sleep," he said. "A man must sleep sometimes when he is weary, and I was heavy with care. But I was awakened by the sting of a sweating and a stink of burning wood, and as I am a Christian man, I found that I was alone and that all the house was afire about me. How I got into the open I know not, being so bowed down with woe. But get out I did somehow and sat on the grass and watched Braginton burning."

"How came it on fire?" Henry Elizabeth asked with a calmness of voice that surprised him.

"The Lord alone knows," answered the parson heavily, "and the Lord has been pleased to keep the knowledge to himself. Mayhap Jonas Copping did it by accident seeking for drink in the cellar and then took to his heels in fear of what he had done, or maybe he did it of malice prepense to pay you out for what he deemed your neglect of his sister, and then decamped with such booty as he could carry about him. I cannot say. I am no wiser than my fellows. All I know is that there is an end of Braginton, and as in consequence I had no roof over my head, and no better fortune than a matter of a few guineas in my pocket, I made up my mind

to tramp it to London and tell your honour my tale as an honest steward should."

Henry Elizabeth was not much of a philosopher, but he found in this drear record food for reflections and regrets and repentances that had their own sorrowful philosophies. His foolish youth had engendered its punishment. He hoped dully that the punishment had in some measure purged the offence.

"You always were a drunken fool," he said to Eldwood, "and you are a drunken fool to-day, and I take it that you will always be a drunken fool. But because I once consorted with you and was not ashamed of so doing, you have a measure of claim upon my charity which you shall not lack because you bring me black news."

Therewith he removed the parson's belt and tethered him by the wrist to his stirrup leather. Then he mounted and rode at an easy pace to Exeter with the parson stumbling and grunting by his side. Henry Elizabeth tried to reflect upon the ugly tidings he had just heard, but his mind refused to dwell upon them with intelligence. All that old world of Braginton had been for so long well-nigh forgotten, or, if remembered at all, only as one sometimes remembers the incident in a dim and distant dream. When it was forced upon his memory the other day by Tobias Flood it had seemed as if the sailor had been talking of matters concerning some other man than himself, and it was only with an effort that he could convince himself that he had duties to fulfill in Devon. And now on his return to Devon he found himself with a series of tragic troubles that might well dash a man who carried a light heart, while *he* carried a heavy one.

It was in a gloomy mood therefore that he rode at last into Exeter with the drunken parson cursing by his side, and made for the inn which he had used on his outward journey. There he saw the parson put to bed and gave bond for his provender, sternly refusing to sanction any administration of liquor. He left the parson sleeping like a hog; left him hating him, and yet asking himself bitterly how far he would ever have been better than this foolish sot but for God's providence.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### BRAGINTON AGAIN

**I**N the afternoon of a late October day Henry Elizabeth rode down the lane towards Braginton. It had rained in the morning, and though the day was now clear, the power of the rain was still abroad in the mire on the road, in the pools, in the ditches, in the scent of wet leaves and wet earth, in the dampness that reeked from trees and hedges. The air was wet to suck in, and the moist south-west wind breathed its melancholy over the sodden fields. It was indeed a dreary day, but then, Henry Elizabeth rode on dreary business, so that the day suited his errand.

As he came to the forge, which was unoccupied and shuttered close, he came to a halt for a little space, recalling with a heart-racking exactitude the events of that fateful afternoon. Then he went on, jogging slowly, thinking slowly. There, just to his right hand, was the spot where the woman had stood, the woman he loved when he saw her for the first time. There, at that window to his left, open then to the favourable March air, now blankly shut against the cold October mist, the woman he had not loved stood when he saw her for the last time. Up the lane he now followed he had walked so heavily on that memorable day of spring.

A little farther up the road he got his first glimpse of what had once been Braginton Manor House. The shattered shell, the cracked and crumbling walls, the vacant spaces that had then been comfortable windows affording spacious views outside and homely cheer within, seemed to grin at him in derision as he neared the ruin. He reflected with a clear head that made neither too much nor too little of the matter, on his childhood behind those four walls, and his boyhood and his early manhood, and all the heavy meaningless days before ever he met the Lady of the Forge.

When he came to the gate, swinging wrecked and ruined upon its hinges, to the comely open space before the Manor House, Henry Elizabeth dismounted and tethered his horse to the post. But he did not pass through the gap and advance towards the Manor. He needed no nearer view of its gaunt tragedy. Time and fairer fortune might restore the ravage of fire, and what had been the home of his youth and of his race might be, if God willed, the hospital of his old age. But he had now to think of things that neither speed of time nor change of fortune could ever alter.

Leaving his ruined mansion on his right hand, Henry Elizabeth went slowly afoot along the sodden path that led to the little ancient church and its God's acre. He passed into the church-yard, and after a momentary glance around he saw what he sought. There was a newly-made grave in an angle of the enclosure with a headstone set above it, and Henry Elizabeth, striding towards it across the dripping grass, knew that he had found what he had come to see. The scripture on the stone did no more than record the simple statement that the body of the wife of Henry Elizabeth Braginton reposed there, together with the date of her birth and the date of her death.

Henry Elizabeth stared stupidly at the inscription. He found it hard to realise that it had any relationship to him, or to his life, or his desires. He remembered the woman even now, though the interval was so brief, as a wild high-tempered creature, whom it sometimes amused his heaviness to tease into fury. But he could not, as he stood there, ankle deep in the wet grass, bring himself to understand that the woman who was buried there was indeed his wife, or to feel any pang of individual regret. That she was young and that she was dead was sad, but that was part of the world's common sorrow and not of his private woe. He thought but dully, without realisation, of his lost child.

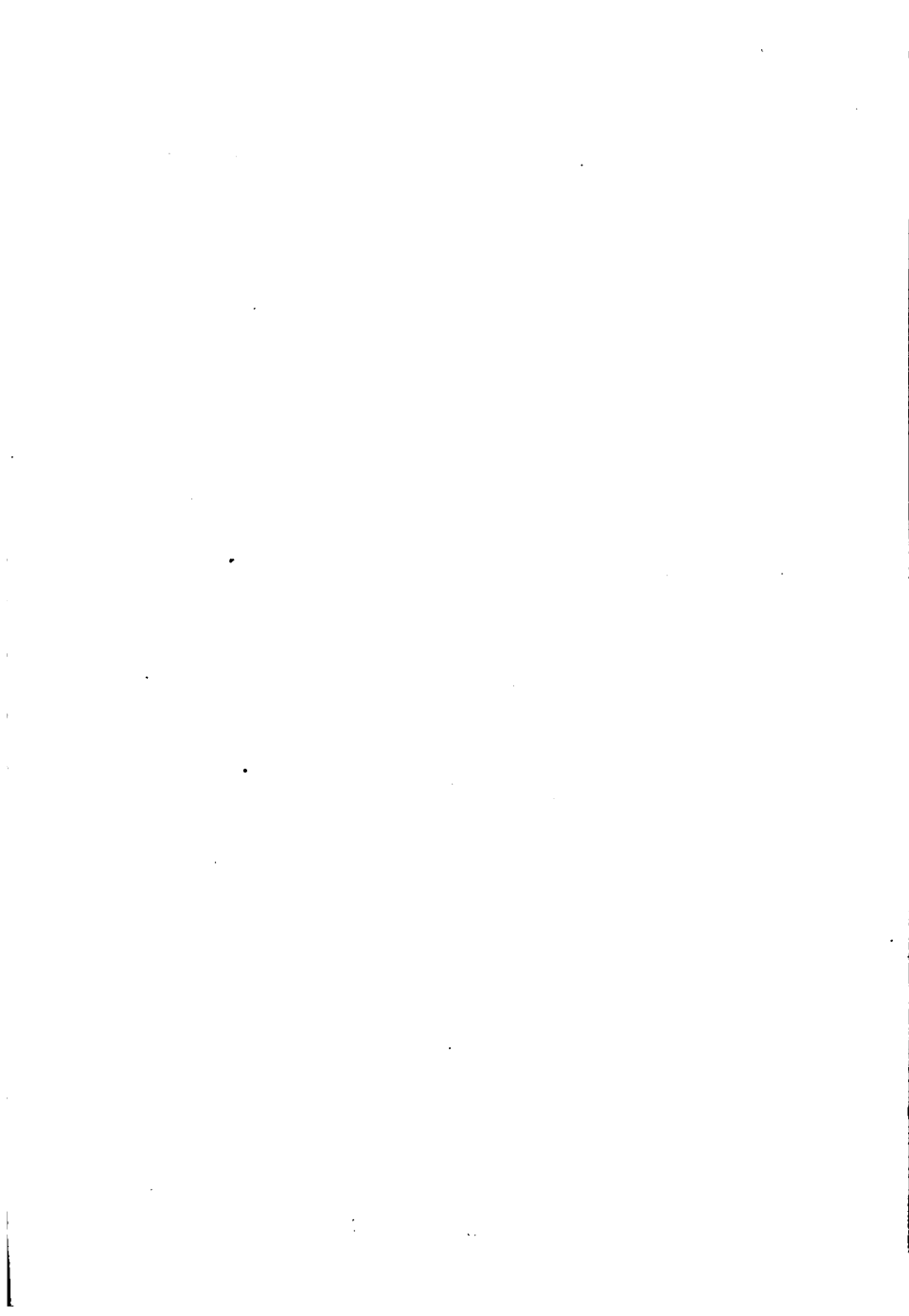
He turned round amid the rotting leaves and the dank grasses and glanced over the churchyard wall at the ruin beyond and below of the dwelling that had been the pride of generations of the masters of Braginton. A vague sense of the inevitability of things, of the necessary law of destruction troubled him a little, but not overmuch. He stamped and splashed over the leaves to the churchyard gate and swung it open and stood

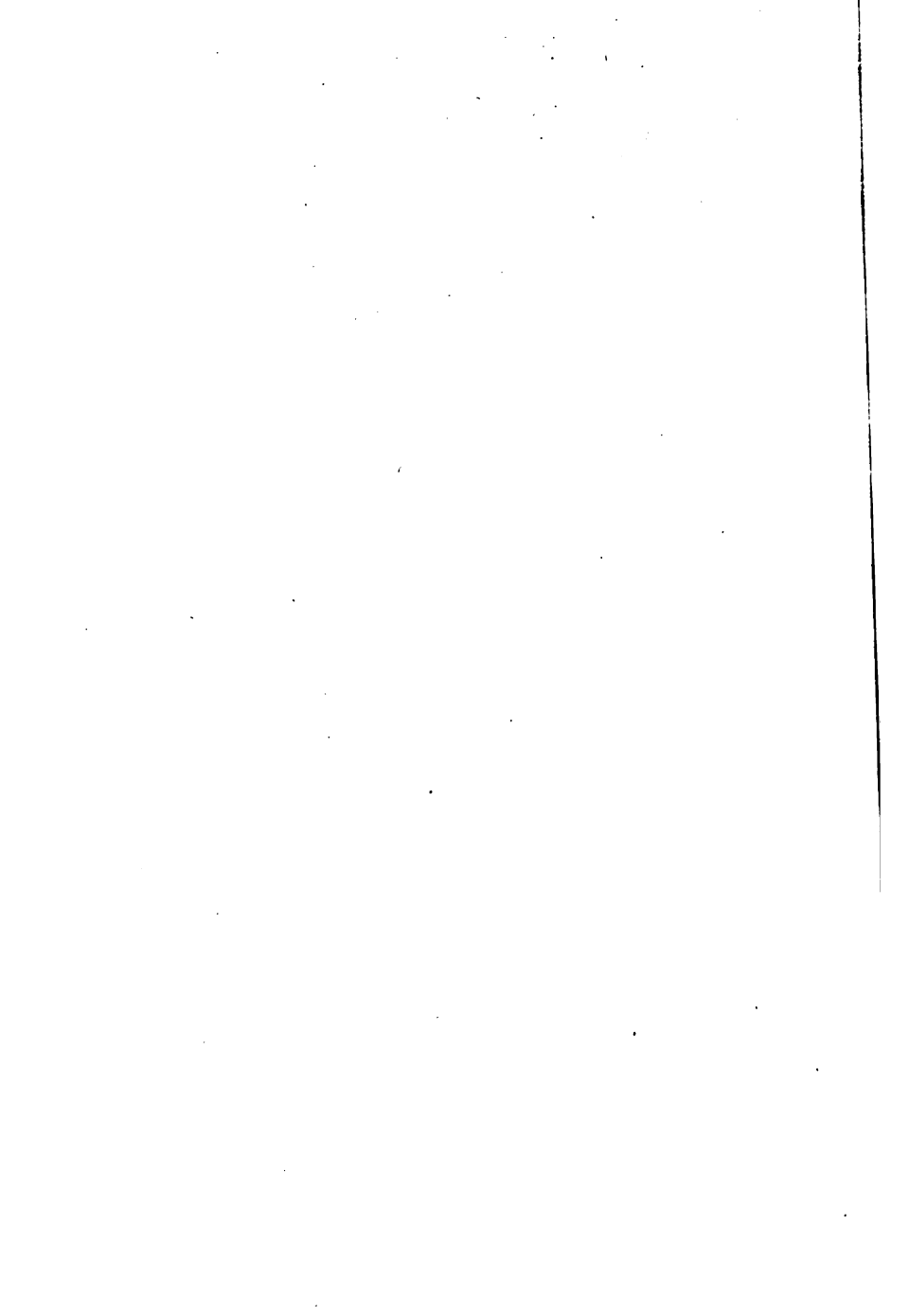
with a hand upon its topmost rail, looking back and embracing in a common view the latest grave of the sacred place and the shattered walls beyond of the manor of his family. As he mounted his horse and rode away into a new life a queer crowding confused sense of the morning when he had stolen away from his birthplace on his adventure towards London came over him. What, he asked himself inarticulately, had he won and lost in the enterprise? How did he stand in his account with fate?

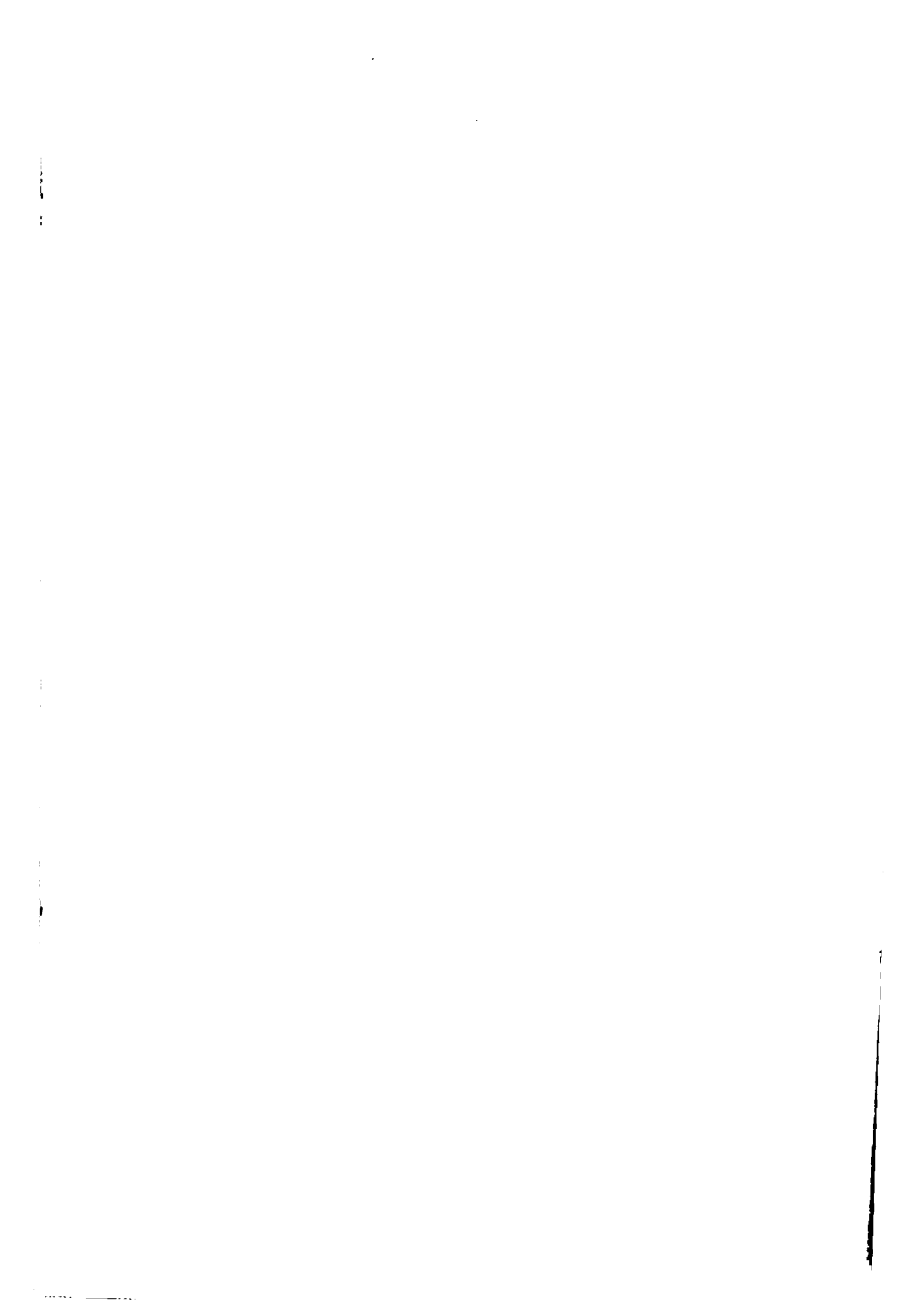
"I have neither a house," he said to himself, "nor a wife, nor a child, nor a lover. What have I left that a man needs, after all is said and done?"

So he questioned. Then he struck himself a smart blow on the breast and answered in a big voice, "Myself."

THE END









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